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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S EDINBURGH DAYS

Robert Louis Stevenson's Edinburgh Days

by

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Birth and Parentage

"The happiest lot on earth is to be born a Scotsman."
—*Silverado Squatters.*

"Here a boy he dwelt, through all the singing season,
And ere the day of sorrow departed as he came."
—*Underwoods.*

CHAPTER I

Birth and Parentage

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, speaking of the insignificant river which has carved for itself a gorge through the west end of Edinburgh, credits this murky Water of Leith with making music in his memory. Within a bow-shot of it he first saw the light, on November 13th, 1850.

His birthplace, 8 Howard Place, is in an unpretentious street, then one of the northernmost outskirts of Edinburgh. In the middle of the century there were, on this road to the Forth, old country houses, whose ample parks and pleasaunces made verdant spots amid the grey encroaching town. Facing Louis's first home, black against the sky-line, stands the shaggy ridge of Corstorphine Hill. On that hillside he made Alan Breck and David Balfour part

company awhile, to meet again at Silvermills not far from his birthplace. Buildings have shut out this westerly outlook, and now Howard Place is hemmed in on all sides, though the gimp gardens in front of its two-storied modest houses, as well as the big laburnums and plenteous lilacs, tell by their free growth of greater space and air in more rustic days.

Louis's home for the first seven winters of his life was in that neighbourhood, and he had a plentiful supply of such flowers and sunshine as Edinburgh is endowed with, and breezes with a whiff of the sea in them. Louis had an ever-green freshness of memory. Cheerful recollections of his hopeful, happy childhood were stamped indelibly on his mind.

His first nurse was a widow, who in after years read his books with great pride, though she had not seen him since she left him a helpless baby. She had a fancy for tales of a blood-curdling description, and took special interest in her foster-son's most gruesome stories, flattering herself he had imbibed the appetite for such from her.

In the dawn of his days she took him for his first taste of the outer air into the Botanic Gardens, which are nearly opposite his birthplace. Lying full to the sun, with sheltered paths, fenced by walls and trees from the nipping sweep of easterly winds, it was an inviting parade ground for nurses and their tender charges. Louis, in his *Child Play*, as if he had not forgotten these immature days, speaks of the lazy interest which children, wheeled along in perambulators and half sunk in a species of pleasing stupor, evince in their surroundings.

We can conjure up the image of the future author at this stage, in a hat bulky with protective ear-bows, absurdly chubby of cheek, with his dark eyes alertly noting the things of colour and life within his range, or contemplating other juveniles with placid condescension, as in this wordless state of existence they passed one another by with exchange of infantine smiles. He also studied the world from the windows of his home. The students of botany, hurrying in the May mornings to their lecture among the flowers, might often have seen a small child held up to the

window to gaze at the lads, who were almost as early astir as the dust-carts.

When Louis was beginning to toddle on his unstable legs and to talk in a language only his parents understood, he had the good fortune to have Alison Cunningham engaged as his nurse. From the lucky day she crossed his path, he may be said to have had two mothers. The task of guarding his health and harbouring his feeble strength gave ample work to a couple of capable women. Robert Louis Stevenson was not like many eventually successful Scots, who have had to fight their way upward from a lowly rung on the ladder. He was born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth. An only son, a treasured child, he had before him substantial worldly prospects. He was reared in a home where he was lapped in love. A poor lad has often at least one advantage over a rich one, for in the narrow sphere of a cottage he tastes life nearest the bone, where it is sweetest, and has the full benefit of his mother's watchful guardianship without any intervening nursery. But young Louis, when social duties kept Mrs. Stevenson

from him, ever had his "second mother" at his beck and call.

When he grew big enough to take daily walks abroad, a neighbour recollects watching him as he was led along on the sunniest side of the pavement, firmly gripping nurse's hand, his face flanked with flannel, for he suffered continually from earache.

A tender little plant he looked, despite the plumpness of babyhood which still rounded his cheeks. His daily walks did not extend very far. He often peered through the gates of Warriston, looking up at the square house standing pleasantly in its beech-fringed park. When he grew old enough to digest grisly tales, he learned how an Edinburgh tragedy had been enacted there: how a wife hired a man to beat her husband to death, and how she walked up and down the long corridor looking out on the silver-stemmed beeches till the cries of the wretched man were stilled.

A pond in the Botanic Gardens, with a verdant knoll rising out of it, was another pet place of young Louis's; water and even a make-believe

island were early attractive to him. Adventurous daisies pied the old turf there before their due season, and the boy, ever fond of flowers, used to pick these stunted pioneers, and with the painfully short-stemmed posy, limp with being pressed in his hot hands, he would hurry home to his mother. "Cummy" had to lift him up in her long-suffering arms every time they crossed Canonmills Bridge, to look over the parapet and watch the Water of Leith as it swirled down in winter, a turbulent flood overflowing its channel, and hiding the grass under its darkling, frothy waters. "Often and often I desire to look upon it again," he says,—not from this bridge, perhaps, but from a point some miles further inland, where it ran, speckled with mill foam, past his grandfather's manse. Beside this drumlie river at Canonmills Bridge, there was to be seen a garden, which flourished under the lee of the protecting parapet. It was a reminder of country days, a garden with strawberry plots edged by a border of old-fashioned flowers, and apple and pear trees blooming early in the hollow. Young Louis could watch the first hints

of spring from his outlook on the bridge. When he was at Samoa, it is recorded of him that "his eyes were never at rest, nothing escaped his notice—birds, flowers, or the tiny snow-white clouds hanging high in the blue empyrean." So when but a toddling bairn, holding to Cummy's hand for support and guidance, his quick eyes noted everything around him.

Louis Stevenson acquired, almost in infancy, a fancy for mills, and close by his first Edinburgh home stood some red-roofed, grey-walled mills, where, some eight hundred years before, corn had been ground for the canons of Holyrood. The mill lades have long since been buried and turned into town drains, and the quaint cottages with the outside stairs that gathered around the ancient mills with the red roofs will not see a new century.

The history of his native town was of interest to this slim son of hers even when he was small. His kith and kin for generations had been citizens of Auld Reekie. His grandsire's people had dwelt within its old walls. His mother's connections, the Balfours, owned Pilrig, on the main road that

stretched from the city of his childhood to the sea. Pilrig House stood then in its pleasaunce, and Leith Walk was a country road. Louis speaks of his grandfather racing up the green avenue to Pilrig House, and as a student marching up the Bridges "in trim stockinged legs in that city of cocked hats and good Scotch still unadulterated." Louis sent his hero, David, to Pilrig to see his cousin, the Laird, so he was related to his own creation. David Balfour saw Pilrig House much as Robert Louis Stevenson's grandfather, Lewis Balfour, knew it in his young days, when corpses creaked in chains on the Gallows Lee, between Pilrig and Edinburgh.

It was at this grandfather's manse at Colinton that Louis first learned, he says, to love mills. "Had I an ancestor a miller?" he asks, to account for this early developed taste, and he finds a Stevenson who was a lessee of the Canonmills. A Bailie Stevenson, who lived at the time of the Restoration, and "the miller of Canonmills, worthy man!" were, he feared, really debarred from his pedigree, and he complains, "I am re-

duced to a family of inconspicuous maltsters." Whence through the trail of heredity he drew some of his special gifts it is not hard to trace, for he came of a shrewd and cultivated stock. But his peculiarities in manner and appearance cannot be accounted for by his forbears. He has taken us with him in a Stevensonian genealogical hunt, a hunt pursued at intervals of several years, which he ultimately wove into the *Records of a Family of Engineers.* He came to the conclusion that "on the whole the Stevensons may be described as decent, reputable folk, following honest trades—millers, maltsters, and doctors—playing the character parts in the Waverley Novels with propriety if without distinction, and to an orphan looking about him in the world for a potential ancestry offering a plain and quite unadorned refuge equally free from shame and glory."

His direct paternal kinsmen, who bore successively the name of Robert, sprang, in 1675, from one James Stevenson, of Nether Carsewell, maltster, in the then clean and handsome city on the Clyde. Louis's grandfather was the third Robert in this line. He had been early left an orphan, his

young father, Alan Stevenson, and Alan's brother, Hugh, having died in the West Indies, whither they had gone in pursuit of an unjust steward. Alan's widow married a second time, a widower, Thomas Smith, who carried on a trade in oil, and brought into the Stevenson blood a love of lamps, a love a future Stevenson who "stayed at home and played with paper like a child" fully inherited. "I will say it fairly," he writes, "it grows on me with every year; there are no stars so lovely as Edinburgh street lamps. *When I forget thee, Auld Reekie, may my right hand forget its cunning.*"

Thomas Smith, who was an enterprising man, began to trade with the Northern Lights Commissioners, and he brought to their notice the advantages of oil lamps and reflectors as compared with the open fires of coals. He had a daughter by his previous marriage. His stepson, young Robert Stevenson, fixed on this semi-sister as his helpmeet, and found in her a piously inclined douce wife. From among the many children she bore him but three of the sons survived, the future builders of harbours and those

great pharoses which form round our coasts a chain of brilliant, helpful Northern Lights.

There can be no doubt whence Louis imbibed his love of adventure and of the sea. Ships bulk largely in Tusitala's tales. A ship very appropriately appeared on his monument at San Francisco, a fine old-world galley of the build those Vikings used in their sea-raidings. There hung in the house of Louis's boyish great-grandfather, Alan Stevenson, "and," he says, "successively in those of my grandfather and father, an oil painting of a ship of many tons burthen. The picture was preserved through years of hardship, and remains to this day in the possession of the family, the only memorial of my great-grandsire Alan. It was on this ship that he sailed on his last adventure, summoned to the West Indies by Hugh." In his *Memories* Louis relates how a frigate in a window took his eye, and "when upon any Saturday we made a party to behold the ships we passed that corner, and since in those days I loved a ship as a man loves Burgundy or daybreak, this of itself was enough to hallow it."

If engineering in 1870 had been as much on the rough as it was some eighty years before, Thomas Stevenson would not have had any difficulty in persuading his son to follow in the footsteps of his sires. Louis, speaking sympathetically, yet enviously, of the difficulties and dangers his grandfather, Robert Stevenson, had to face when trying to light our dark coasts, says: "It must not be forgotten that these voyages in the tender were the particular pleasure and reward of his existence; that he had in him a reserve of romance which carried him delightedly over these hardships and perils, that to him it was 'a great gain' to be eight nights and seven days in the savage Bay of Levensurck—to read a book in the much-agitated cabin, to go on deck and hear the gale scream in his ears and see the landscape dark with rain and the ship plunge at her two anchors, and to turn in at night and wake again at morning in his narrow berth to the clamorous and continued voices of the gale." This near relative bequeathed some of his characteristics with a bountiful plenitude to his descendant, for from him Louis inherited his "anxious exacti-

tude about details, an interesting flow of conversation, a taste for sea and adventure, and lastly that *reserve* of *romance*." Louis, remarking on his grandfather's letters to his small sons, says that besides all these he had "a fine scent of all that was romantic to a boy."

From his mother's side Louis, like David Balfour, came of the Balfours of Pilrig. His grandfather was what he called "a herd of men." In *Memories and Portraits* he gives us a well-executed sketch of Mrs. Stevenson's old home, and of her father, the Rev. Lewis Balfour, in his manse at Colinton. The minister we see grey of locks, handsome of feature, upright of carriage, smacking his lips over a "barley-sugar kiss," a sweetmeat administered to Louis as a reward after a dose of medicine. Louis's last recollection of his grandfather was of an old gentleman sternly forbidding his daughter, Miss Balfour, to give a lollipop to her expectant nephew, for the boy had had no horrid gregory to swallow. From the Balfours the author took his name, except the Robert, which came to him from the Stevensons. His mother disliked the names Thomas

and Robert, and wished the latter excluded. Mr. Stevenson, however, had the old-fashioned belief in a grandson bearing the name of his father's father, though he said he might drop it for every-day use. He promised his wife her boy would be spoken of as Lewis, unless she had another son, when, according to hereditary rule, she had the naming of him after her father. Robert Lewis Balfour our hero was baptized. Perhaps he thought there was a superabundance of letters in R. L. B. S. The Balfour soon dropped out of his name, and early he became R. L. S., which initials, says Mr. Barrie, "are, I suppose, the best beloved in recent literature; certainly they are the sweetest to me."

He also, like his grandsire, started in life with his name spelt Lewis. The story of the change to Louis is remarkable. Mr. Stevenson was a strong Conservative. Now in Robert Louis Stevenson's youthful years there was a Radical town councillor yclept Lewis. So strong was Mr. Stevenson's aversion to the man that he ordered that in future his son's name should be spelt differently, even with a Frenchified turn in

it, for fear the two families should be thought in any way connected. So the boy's patronymic was in a manner severed from the minister of Colinton, and his mother often regretted he had dropped her father's honoured surname. Young Robert Louis owns that he felt he had little in common with the Rev. Dr. Lewis Balfour. "Now," he writes, "I often wonder what I inherited from this old minister. Try as I please, I cannot join myself on with the reverend doctor; and all the while, no doubt, and even as I write the phrase, he moves in my blood and whispers words to me, and sits efficient in the very knot and centre of my being."

Louis's mother was born in the old manse of Colinton. "A large family," her boy says, "of stalwart sons and tall daughters was housed and reared, and came to man and womanhood in that nest of little chambers, so that the face of the earth was peppered with the children of the manse, and letters with outlandish stamps became familiar to the local postman. The dullest could see this was a house that had a pair of hands in divers foreign places." Though Balfours wandered

afar over the globe, it was not so much love of travel as the Scot's destiny which impelled them to leave the crowded homeland and cross the seas in search of work. The commanding presence of the silvery-headed divine who shepherded his human flocks at Colinton filled the eye and duly impressed his small namesake. Louis regretted no share of the Balfour fine looks had come his way. The children of the old manse were a blue-eyed race, shapely in feature and noble in carriage. In 1863 Louis, in *Random Memories*, mentions that at Leven there was still to be seen "the tall figure and white locks of the last Englishman in Delhi, my uncle, Dr. Balfour, who was still walking his hospital rounds, while the troopers from Meerut clattered and cried 'Deen Deen' along the streets of the imperial city." Another Dr. Balfour, whom Louis calls "that wise youth, my uncle," testifies in Edinburgh to-day that the Balfours are a strikingly good-looking race. Louis's mother was a slim, active woman, and no one seeing her in her latter years, with her erect figure and fresh face, would have believed her the mother of a son who had died aged forty-five. Mrs. Stevenson

was a cultured and clever woman. Luckily Louis inherited her bright, vivacious disposition; but he tells us the Balfours were unemotional, hating the display of what they felt. Their descendant was the reverse of this, and his original unconventionality, his tropical temperament, and his foreign appearance, cannot be traced to any of his progenitors. Louis wrote most likely with a twinkle of fun lighting up his Southern sunny eyes. "To one more tradition I may allude, that we are somehow descended from a French barber-surgeon who came to St. Andrews in the service of one of the Cardinal Beatons. No details were added. But the very name of France was so detested in my family for three generations that I am tempted to suppose there may be something in it."

There was another Stevenson, one of Louis's cousins, who seemed to have a strong dash of Bohemianism, though he too came of the same orderly family of engineers. There can be no doubt that it was from some Stevenson that they acquired alien blood, for two of his descendants rebelled against the prim decorum of the accepted

codes of social life, and both refused a lucrative and hereditary seat in the office their sires had made, preferring the more precarious earnings by pen and brush. The fact that the two bore the same grandfather's name, and were in many things so alike, make it clear that this gipsy strain came from the father's side, though as far back as the author of *A Family of Engineers* (feeling, he says, as if he had his ancestors' souls in his charge all the while) could fathom, the Stevensons, and the wives they married, were an industrious, thrifty set of quiet-going, reputable folk.

In a delightful genealogical glimpse, Louis, when wandering over "our ancestral adventures which are beyond even the arithmetic of fancy," to account for perverse caprices, harks back to "tree-top memories like undeveloped negatives" lying dormant in his mind. "And though, to-day, I am only a man of letters," he goes on to say, "either tradition errs, or I was present when there landed at St. Andrews a French barber-surgeon, to tend the health and the beard of the great Cardinal Beaton. I have shaken a spear in the Debateable Land, and shouted the slogan of

the Elliots. I was present when a skipper, plying from Dundee, smuggled Jacobites to France after the '15. I was in a West India merchant's office, perhaps next door to Bailie Nicol Jarvie, and managed the business of a plantation in St. Kitts. I was with my engineer-grandfather (the son-in-law of the lamp and oil man) when he sailed north about Scotland on the famous cruise that gave us *The Pirate and the Lord of the Isles*; I was with him, too, on the Bell Rock in the fog, when the *Smeaton* drifted from her moorings, and the Aberdeen men, pick in hand, had seized upon the only boats, and he must stoop and lap sea-water before his tongue could utter audible words; and once more with him when the Bell Rock beacon took a 'thrawe' and his workmen fled into the tower, then nearly finished, and he sat unmoved reading in his Bible—or affecting to read—till one after another slunk back with confusion of countenance to their engineer. Yes, parts of me have seen life, and met adventures, *and sometimes met them well.*" This descendant of these men, although wanting in physical strength, certainly was endowed with their en-

durance and their pluck. Though frail of body, he enjoyed in a manner a robustness of constitution few have equalled, for he found "*true* health is to be able to do without it." He was denied strong lungs and limbs, and any palpable immunity from sickness, yet he had a full measure of lusty vigour, for he faced the ills of the flesh so gallantly that, according to his own argument, he was a Samson in strength.

We have seen whence he gleaned his mettlesome bravery, but we know not which of the many threads and fibres of his being can account for his unique, unnational look, for never could he persuade an official he was a Briton, much less a Scotsman. He was, he complained, cast into dungeons as a spy, arrested as a vagrant pedlar, and looked at askance when he went to cash cheques at strange banks, and his passport was ever most suspiciously scrutinized. It is curious, too, that the descendant of the gentle-blooded Balfours and the even-going Stevensons had such "gangrel feet," which made him long to wander like any genuine gipsy. His whole being yearned for brilliance of colouring

and the sunshiny heat of the South. "There is one of nature's spiritual ditties," he early wrote, "that has not yet been set to words or human music, 'The Invitation to the Road,' an air continually sounding in the ears of gipsies, and to whose inspiration our nomadic fathers journeyed all their days."

Louis was not given a musical ear along with his poetic endowments, but this spiritual song he could always appreciate, and he would not have changed ears with those who cannot hear its music. "What sleeper in green tree-tops, what muncher of nuts concludes my pedigree?" Robert Louis Stevenson asks anxiously. It seems to us some long dormant "tree-top instinct" awoke in him and sent him away from us to settle amid the gaudy, luxuriant richness of a South Sea isle. Some unrecorded progenitor must have listened to that nomadic spiritual ditty which gipsies hear so readily and sing so invitingly, leading others with them along the free and open road. For Louis undisguisedly delighted to escape out of what he called the Bastille of civilization, and become "a mere kindly animal and a sheep of nature's

flock," even though on his travels he found "the globe, granite underfoot and strewn with cutting flints."

Thomas Stevenson

"The life-work of Thomas Stevenson remains; what we have lost, what we now try to recall, is the friend and companion."—*Memories and Portraits.*

CHAPTER II

Thomas Stevenson

THOUGH his pedigree does not shed much light on the origin of Louis' Southern looks, his responsive, mobile manners, his special gifts, we have more authentic acquaintance with those to whom he owed his existence, those who guided and guarded him in his youth, and gave a training bend to his thoughts when he was but a green twig.

It vexed Mrs. Stevenson in her latter years to hear or see it stated that Louis and his father were antagonistic, and had waged a bitter civil war. People, she said, assumed that types of unhappy youths such as Archie Weir and examples of rebellion against parental authority were drawn from the author's own personal experience. There was, it is true, a deal of diversity between Thomas

Stevenson's nature and that of his only child, but underlying the engineer's reserved decorum and sombreness there were many points of resemblance and sympathy between father and son. No one enjoyed Thomas Stevenson's talk more than Louis, who says it was "compounded of so much sterling sense and so much freakish humour, and clothed in language so apt, droll, and emphatic, that it was a perpetual delight to all that knew him. His use of language was both just and picturesque. Love, anger, and indignation shone through him and broke forth in imagery, like what we read of in Southern races." Louis gloried in his father's whimsical fancies, his "blended sternness and softness that was wholly Scottish, and at first somewhat bewildering; with a profound essential melancholy of disposition, and (what often accompanies it) the most humorous geniality in company." No one, I think, appreciated his father's good qualities, his humour, his quips and fads, even his dogged theological views, more than the son who drew so just and masterly a portrait of Thomas Stevenson, Civil Engineer.

"Smout" Mr. Stevenson rechristened his small

boy, a name he was long known by in his home circle. Smout was simply worshipped by his two mothers. On the brief days of winter, when his mother and Cummy were partakers of a gorgeous banquet, while he, the dispenser of the feast, sat in a paper crown and presided over the mimic tea-set (which still lives on Cummy's table), the small boy, hearing the gate click, and his father's key in the latch, would fly downstairs to greet the master of the house and invite him to the "party." No caressing and adoration that had been lavished upon this sole monarch of the nursery was half so appreciated by his majesty as the kindly glance he saw beam on him from out of his father's deep-set eyes, and the strong hand held out to him, and the grave, interrogative greeting, "Well, Smout?" The open-hearted, manifestly affectionate boy quite understood his apparently undemonstrative father; and though they bickered in words when the son grew up, and argued and discussed with much warmth, a good fellowship always existed between them. Louis always warred in words with his friends, and neither filial affection nor fear of his father's displeasure ever rendered him dumb

or submissive. The two fought many a duel which, to outsiders, seemed irreverent rebellion on the son's part, but the father liked his boy's fearless thrusts. He could, truly, from his heart, dedicate a volume "in love and gratitude" to the father "by whose devices the great sea-lights in every quarter of the world now shine more brightly."

Mr. Stevenson came of a large family, of which only five survived. They were mown down by the harvester Death two or three at a time. Thomas Stevenson's mother, her grandson says, was "a devout, unambitious woman, occupied with her Bible, her children, and her house; easily shocked, and associating largely with a clique of godly parasites." She seemed strongly tinctured with narrow, pietistical morbidness, and certainly two of her grandchildren — Robert Alan and Robert Louis—did not derive their puzzling peculiarities from her. Some of her characteristics reappear in Mrs. Weir. "The scene has often been described to me of my grandfather sawing with darkened countenance at some indissoluble joint, 'Preserve me, my dear, what kind of a reedy, stringy beast is this?' of the joint removed,

the pudding substituted and uncovered; and of my grandmother's anxious glance and hasty deprecatory comment, 'Just mismanaged.' The cook was a godly woman, the butcher a Christian man, and the table suffered." Lord Hermiston's case is almost parallel, Mrs. Weir having a household of "Christian servants" quite incompetent like Mrs. Robert Stevenson's.

Thomas Stevenson, brought up by this bigotedly pious mother, who early became such a "veteran in affliction," had what her grandson aptly describes as "a sense of humour under strong control." About him was an air of imperturbable gravity, but below his portentous seriousness there often lurked a smile at the corner of the firm-set mouth, and those who knew him best, knew the staunch, warmly affectionate nature of the man. He looked on the sickly colour and the high brow of his small Smout, and was oppressed by the fear that his all-precious, only child would wither away, for he remembered how his brothers and sisters, though they had appeared to be rosy and strong, never grew up. He came of a healthy family. These were unsanitary times,

and whooping cough and measles were rife in their tightly packed flat. Thomas Stevenson used to lull himself to sleep with self-told tales which dealt perpetually with ships, roadside inns, robbers, old sailors, and commercial travellers before the use of steam. They seem to us the foundation of many stories we know. In one of his essays Louis speaks of Scotch children hearing much of "shipwreck, outlying iron skerries, pitiless breakers, and great sea-lights; much of heathery mountains, wild clans, and hunted Covenanters." There was certainly one Northern bairn who heard much of these things as he sat on his father's knee. This verbal record of the engineers was full of a lively interest to young Louis. He heard how French frigates threatened to capture the engineer's ship; how his father as a boy, touring with his father, was all but wrecked in a fog; and how they once fired a gun opposite a fishing village in order to rouse up the inhabitants to their help, and roused instead a camp of wreckers, who calmly waited for them to drift on to the rocks. All the history of these embryo days of engineering was good to listen to, and little Louis

pondered over it and enacted some of the most exciting bits anew in the nursery. He longed then to grow up and go and light the mariner home, and warn him of shoals by a newer Inchcape Bell, so—

"Whether fogs arise, and far and wide
The low sea level drown—each finds a tongue,
And all night long the bell resounds,
So shine, so toll, till night be overpast,
Till the stars vanish, till the sun return,
And in the haven rides the fleet secure."

Mr. Stevenson not only gave his little Tusitala a taste for adventurous tales, but his peculiar theories on education were the theories which best suited his son. To look at Thomas Stevenson a hasty observer would have thought he had been one of those that uphold a rigid course of study, and rigidly apply the tawse if need be. But he himself in his learning time had been a consistent idler, and he held he acquired more by idling than he did on the school bench. He would stop schoolboys in the street, look at their burden of books, shake his head over such trash, and advise them with earnestness to pay no

heed to the rubbish which was being crammed into them. He begged them to look about them, play to their heart's content, but to read or study only what their inclination dictated. The schoolboys would, open-mouthed, gaze at the firm-faced man who seriously propounded such palatable views. They keenly suspected he was making fun of them, and went on their way puzzled. He never ceased to expostulate against the absurdity of education as conducted at present in the seats of learning. Never by his father was Louis asked how he stood in his classes. Mr. Stevenson simply did not oppose the boy's being sent to school.

One amusing episode of Robert Louis Stevenson's school days and his father's manner of teasing the boy comes down to us in one of his minor pieces. "Robert's voice," a master had said, "is not strong, but impressive." "This opinion," Louis adds, "I was fool enough to carry home to my father, who roasted me for years in consequence." If Louis, in some dispute or childish excitement, raised his tone to a shrill pitch, Mr. Stevenson would listen with

intentional gravity, and when Louis's treble was silenced would turn to a visitor and remark, "Louis is noted at school for his impressive voice," and would meditate on their stupidity in not having been impressed thereby, till their attention had been drawn towards the force of that not strong voice. Meanwhile the boy, smarting under the well-applied rebuke, would in vain, with his tones getting shriller at every word, protest against this oft-recurring sarcasm, till, in a fit of impotent rage, he would fly to the nursery to be praised and adored. All the flattery mother and nurse lavished on him was not as sweet to him as one word or glance of approval from his father. When he was grown up, Mr. Stevenson at times referred to this old blister, and Louis, remembering the smart every allusion to his impressive voice had given him when in frocks, laughed at the remembrance. Even in these after years, when the son had a ready affluence of speech wherewith to argue and defend himself against his father, Mr. Stevenson, I think, still came off victorious. Louis's talk was too wordy and spoken in unheeding haste. It was

like water sparkling on shallows. He gesticulated the while impatiently. His father sat immovable, and brought the heavy artillery of his speech to bear with annihilating force on the *feu de joie* and rapid cannonade of words which flowed from his son's lips. In fact, in peace or war, Mr. Stevenson was very like the strong towers he built, devoid of all elaborate flourishes, solid, reliable, able to meet the strength of the attacking waves without flinching, immovable as they splashed or fretted or dashed around him.

A thorough man of business, inventing many improvements for strengthening and perfecting the revolving lights for the pharoses, acknowledged at home and abroad as a distinguished man in his profession, he had excellent taste and discrimination in books, pictures, and engravings. He was partial to sunflowers and antique furniture. Long before they were revived as a fashionable mania, Mr. Stevenson had a piece of the handiwork of that double-faced scoundrel, Deacon Brodie, who was outwardly a cabinet-maker and a respected official in the Church, but who, beside his legitimate trade, lived by

gambling and burglary. Louis used to complain that the Deacon's cabinet creaked eerily in the night watches.

Mr. Stevenson had, his son says, "a morbid sense of his own unworthiness. He would never consent to be an elder in St. Stephen's, though his advice was often sought, and he served the Church of Scotland on many committees. Morbid, too, was his sense of the fleetingness of life and his concern for death." He once wrote, by request of the editor of a Scottish religious magazine, a paper entitled "Vanity of Vanities: A Layman's Sermon." He preached well. It is distinctly a sermon with grit in it. He describes a worldly man's death and funeral with a grim truthfulness; tells how the dead man's friends, who had often met at his convivial board, assemble in his dining-room for the last time ere their host departs "to the narrow house appointed for all living." With a few masterly strokes he depicts the selfish heartlessness of the dead man's household, the coachman in the harness-room scanning the papers for a new place, the gossiping conversation in the mourning

coaches. "What do we think of his life?" Mr. Stevenson pointedly asks. "Are ours any truer or better? Have we done any more than he did for the sick and suffering poor, or for Christ's cause on the earth?" Thomas Stevenson was a man who pondered much on "the claims of Christ and His cause." He was a man generous in helping the sick or sorrowful in his sincere, unobtrusive way, but that was one light he never flashed before his fellows. He wrote also in the defence of Christianity, and his work was highly praised by many learned authorities. His "Layman's Sermon" is to be found in a volume of his *Life and Work*. It is a pity it is so deeply buried, for many have evinced renewed interest in it since they discovered that it was preached by the father of Robert Louis Stevenson.

In Edinburgh Mr. Stevenson "breathed an air that pleased him," and into the country round the fair city he loved to wander "with a congenial friend, if he did not keep dangling about the town from one book shop to another, and scraping romantic acquaintance with every dog that passed." He addressed all his canine

friends with a courteous civility. There was a liver-and-white spaniel, which long lived a vagrant existence about the west end of Princes Street. Mr. Stevenson used to visit it constantly, and invite it to lunch at a confectioner's. With his slow, purposeful step he would turn aside out of the throng to converse with his four-legged acquaintance, and the spaniel, with hungry brown eyes thirsting for notice, would gaze trustfully up into his steady grey eyes. He christened his friend by a family name, "Bob." I also often greeted this stray spaniel, and Mr. Stevenson was surprised one day when he found we had a mutual friend. At first he pretended to be jealous of any other patron of this spotted dog, but he finally confided to me its name and its tastes. If any one discovered him in a doorway talking to or meditating over Bob, who meanwhile wagged a joyous stumpy tail, and held his head aloft so as to have his chin scratched or his ears pulled, Mr. Stevenson was embarrassed and apologetic. Sometimes at his own table, when the wintry storm was driving at the windows and he was sitting amid peace and plenty, he would,

with real concern, wonder if "Bob" had got into the shelter of some friendly doorway, or whether he had strayed into the Caledonian station and sought shelter by some lamp-room fire. Like other Edinburgh dogs, "Bob" no doubt "raked the backets," *i.e.*, fed off the refuse boxes put out nightly by householders for the dustmen to lift next morning. On Saturday nights no "backets" are put out, as no carts go rumbling along on the Sabbath. Mr. Stevenson was sore distressed that Sunday was unavoidably a fast day for the spaniel and other homeless dogs. He hoped "Bob" was foreseeing and buried a bone, even if it had to be resurrected out of the West Kirk-yard for his Sunday's dinner. Mr. Stevenson only spoke of his four-footed friend when he thought he had a sympathetic listener. He was sincere in his affections, and in his conduct "transparently honest," his son says; but this earnest simplicity of his made him much beloved and much reverenced. Louis, even to a casual observer, was an emotional youth, and evidently a bundle of nerves, whims, and fancies. It surprised strangers to find that the father, a grave, granite-

looking man, was also full of strange theories, fantastic thoughts, and an almost exaggerated chivalry towards all laws and sentiments regarding the weaker sex. His strong leaning to melancholy gave him a pondering, deep-thinking expression. His wife and child, on the other hand, were of gay and sanguine disposition, yet in strong sympathy with the head of the house. It was lucky for all that they, in some measure, counterbalanced his seriousness. The Rev. Lewis Balfour was a "contented gentleman," we read in his grandson's record, and it was well that that youth had his full share of this bright-some Balfour characteristic. He needed it, for if Louis had inherited his father's diffident, darkened nature, it would have gone hard with him. He had so poor a measure of health that he required all his mother's cheerful buoyancy of spirit to carry him over the rough waters of continued sickness. His loss was really our gain, for it was owing to his ill health he was unable to partake in doughty deeds. If he had been able-bodied he would have acted them, and not sat at home and imagined them on paper, for us

as well as for himself. Out of his weakness came his strength, or, as one said of him, "it seems probable that the writer would have been lost had the man been dowered with better health." Perhaps his father's gloominess was an efficient warning to him to cultivate a Mark Tapley jollity of spirits, whatever ill cards Fortune dealt him. He early observed when Mr. Stevenson encountered some comparative molehill in his path and was oppressed with forebodings, that these were dispelled by his mother's invincible determination to look only to the bright side of things.

A writer in a magazine of to-day has stated that Robert Louis Stevenson "was bored with his father's stories, which others enjoyed, and his father was a more lovable man than he in those days. His unpopularity may have been due to his being a bad listener." I do not think this was the case, though I grant the father was a greater favourite than the son, who, in his Edinburgh days, was not generally liked. I personally recollect that Louis seemed always ready to do his utmost in company to draw out Mr. Steven-

son's quaint views or his pet stories. He listened with a sparkle of pleasure in his almond-shaped dark eyes, watching how his father's anecdotes struck the audience, and more anxious than the narrator for the merited approbation. Louis's own way of spinning a yarn was ludicrously different from his father's. Louis had a full flow of language, and he gesticulated freely with both hands while he talked and walked. He could recapitulate no narrative, propound no idea, without waving his thin hands about, shrugging his shoulders absurdly like some typical stage Frenchman. His father spoke in a measured, calm voice, sitting slightly bent forward, with his broad-browed, square-featured, unmistakably Scotch face lit up at seasonable times by a flicker of fun. He would preserve an immovable solemnity of appearance while depicting some humorous incident, and not till it was finished and appreciated by his auditors did the corners of his firmly set mouth relax into a smile.

Mr. Stevenson, with his wife and son, formed a united trio. They had, besides the bonds of affection that closely bound them, many tastes

in common, and a host of jests, a shibboleth of nonsense which the engineer enjoyed as a relaxation from his work and its worries. "How vivid is the remembrance of the happy home in Heriot Row! the kindly, clever head of the house; the bright, pleasant wife and mother; and the fragile, imaginative boy, who was afterwards to become so famous," says a writer in *Chambers' Journal* who evidently knew the trio I speak of well. "We used to wonder how any two of the three could exist if the third were called away, each seemed so necessary to all."

When death, for the second time, made a gap in the circle in December, 1894, the announcement in the obituary column of the *Scotsman* described Robert Louis Stevenson, not as the man of letters the world deplored, but simply as "the only son of the late Thomas Stevenson, C.E." To many in his native Edinburgh he was known as that "only son," whose future seemed all too doubtful in the olden days, when he completed the trio round his father's hearth. If he lived (and that was the foremost and biggest doubt), in the well-known adage of his Northern land, where they sup their broth

with home-made cutlery, he seemed more likely "to mar a horn" than "mak' a spune."

Mrs. Stevenson and her son had often to flee South on health pilgrimages, and leave the engineer alone in the chilly North. He longed to hear daily how they fared. The two invalids had a difficulty in varying the bulletins, and they liked variety. No letter had come from Torquay, so Mr. Stevenson telegraphed for news. "Queen Anne's dead," wired Louis, by his mother's suggestion, in reply. The telegram gave the anxious, lonely man a terrible shock, and he strongly reprimanded the levity of the senders. The two unrepentant culprits often jokingly reminded him of the stern letter they received, and how for the rest of that winter they were reduced to platitudes on the weather or the beauty of their resting-place. Then to defend himself Mr. Stevenson explained what a shock Queen Anne's death had given him that day, and drew a pathetic picture of himself, a solitary man, opening the orange envelope and, owing to a mist of anxiety which dimmed his sight, seeing only two words, "Dead.—Louis."

The head of the house at Heriot Row died in May, 1887, and a volume Louis brought out at that time bore the beautiful dedication :—

TO MY MOTHER,
IN THE
NAME OF PAST JOY AND PRESENT SORROW,
I DEDICATE
THESE MEMORIES AND PORTRAITS.

On a copy of these "honey-dropping essays" he wrote a few lines in Samoa :—

"Much of my soul is here interred,
My very past and mind,
Who listens nearly to the printed word
May hear the heart behind."

Thomas Stevenson was honoured as well as loved by his only son all through his life. Louis knew well that, if his father seemed hard in his censure, his wounds, like those of a friend, were faithful ones. When he realized the responsibility with which a conscientious man like his father regarded the duty of bringing his son up in the way he believed he should go, he understood him all the better, and regretted he had

made his task the harder by resenting his legitimate authority. In the *Silverado Squatters* Louis speaks of a "brother Scot" who drove him about, and was, he says, "as kind to me as if I were his son; even more so, for the *son has faults too keenly felt*, while the abstract countryman is perfect like a whiff of peats."

The father and son had a long dispute over the latter's choice of a profession; but when the son became a master craftsman no one paid him a surer compliment than did the father, who fain would have seen him an engineer, the sixth who had served the Board of Northern Lights. Mr. Stevenson was a believer in Lord Lytton's theory that "more is got from one book on which the thought settles for a definite end in knowledge than from libraries skimmed over by wandering eyes. A cottage garden gives honey to the bee, a king's garden none to the butterfly." Louis tells us his father's three favourite authors were Lactantius, Vossius, and Cardinal Bona. "The first he must have read for twenty years uninterruptedly, keeping it near him in his study, and carrying it in his bag on journeys.

Another old theologian, Brown of Wamphray, was often in his hands. When he was indisposed he had two books, *Guy Mannering* and *The Parent's Assistant*, of which he never wearied." To these select few Thomas Stevenson added two more. They lay on a small table in his dining-room, and were known by his family as "his luncheon bibles." After breakfast he gathered his household for "worship," and for this purpose a big volume of the Book stood handy. After his midday meal he liked a printed page to ponder over. His two favourite luncheon bibles became *An Inland Voyage* and the *Travels with a Donkey*.

When he wandered with his son in print in the Cevennes, he also longed to have an argument with the soldier and the priest at the Lady of the Snows who would have led to Rome Thomas Stevenson, his wife, and their family. Honest man! how he thirsted to have his say and defend his Presbyterianism. When they suggested to Louis that if he would turn Catholic he would convert his parents in time, he exclaimed, "I think I see my father's face! I would rather tackle the

Gætulian lion in his den than embark on such an enterprise against the family theologian."

Many a tough battle, many a wordy war, they had, but they both enjoyed such skirmishes. Louis freely confesses he liked "an adversary who will hold his ground foot by foot and give us full measure of the dust and exertion of battle." Mr. Stevenson thought much over religion and believed much. He was a resolute Presbyterian, a man of strong convictions, but capable of defending them. Louis had been well grounded in the tenets of the Scottish Church. "About the very cradle there goes a hum of metaphysical divinity. I do not wish to make an idol of the Shorter Catechism, but the fact of such a question as, 'What is the chief end of man?' being asked, and answering nobly if obscurely, 'To glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever,' opens to us Scotch a great field of speculation; and the fact that it is asked of all of us, from the peer to the ploughboy, binds us more nearly together."

As he grew up Louis developed very unorthodox, almost atheistical views, going, as youth goes

when given to convulsions of thought, to the far extreme from his upbringing. He also revelled in blazoning abroad his newly acquired views. He judged his father and every one who did not agree with him as bigoted. He did not realize that he himself was strongly tinctured with the short-sighted, overbearing intolerance of youthful inexperience.

Speaking of Ferguson, the poet, who died in his "acute painful youth" in an Edinburgh madhouse, Louis contrasts, in a letter lately published, their mutual weakness and misunderstood sufferings when both were rebellious, headstrong young men. "Ah! what bonds we have. Born in the same city, both sickly, both vicious, both pestered —one nearly to madness and one to the madhouse—with a damnatory creed, both seeing the stars and the moon and wearing shoe leather on the same ancient stones, under the same pends, down the same closes where our common ancestors clashed in their armour rusty or bright."

Louis was less pestered than pestering with the damnatory creed he speaks of. He liked to heckle his father on his strict doctrines, while he

aired his recently acquired ones. Mr. Stevenson replied gravely and earnestly, and, all things considered, was wonderfully patient with the positive, aggressive boy. "To grow a little Catholic is the compensation of years; youth is one-eyed," Louis owned; and if he had lived longer, or if his father and he had met again after Louis left Edinburgh, they might have found they were not so diverse in doctrine.

Louis Stevenson improved with years. The volcanic convulsions of his insurgent days past, he mellowed in character, widened in understanding, and harked back more to the contentment and happy-hearted goodness which made him lovable as a small child. When he shook so violently at the bars of circumstance, and revolted against religion and society, it was no wonder he was not popular in Edinburgh, for he was then lacking in many of the better qualities which endeared him later to the whole world. According to descriptions of him in his latter days at Samoa he seemed to have studied God's Book more in the reverent manner it was studied and read under his father's roof.

Mr. Stevenson and his only son in the teeth of their hot discussions and mutual heartaches were to the last firm friends and comrades. Thomas Stevenson, like his father before him, was full of "unfeigned, unstained, unwearied human kindliness." He was reticent with the reticence of the Scot during his life. Anything out of the ordinary groove which might be construed into a wish to attract notice was repugnant to him; but he desired before the grave in the Dean Cemetery closed over him that there should be read to a few chosen friends his firm belief in "that sure and certain hope," so that they who truly loved and mourned him would have his posthumous message impressed on their minds that it might be to them a stay in time of need.

"17, HERIOT ROW, EDINBURGH.

"May I be allowed to say very humbly—God knows how humbly—that, believing in Christ, I confidently trust I shall not be disowned by Him when the last trumpet shall sound.

"My good friends! I hope our friendship is not ended, but only for a time interrupted, and that

we may all meet again in that better land which has been prepared for us by our Father and our Saviour, the blessed passport to which has been freely offered to all. Amen.

" THOMAS STEVENSON.

" This I desire to be read at my funeral."

Mrs. Stevenson

"It is not yours, O mother, to complain,
Not, mother, yours to weep,
Though never more your son again
Shall to your bosom creep,
Though never more again you watch
Your baby sleep."

—*Underwoods.*

CHAPTER III

Mrs. Stevenson

LOUIS'S mother, as we have seen, was a daughter of the manse. Her old home at Colinton, "a well-beloved house, its image dwelt on by many travellers," is now altered. To casual observers, looking on a picture of it as it was in Mrs. Stevenson's time, it seems much the same as of yore. Casual observers, however, did not know every door, window, and weather-beaten mark on its friendly face, the place of every tree and flower in its garden. The manse drinks deep of the blessings of shelter. It lies in a *cul-de-sac* at the very depth of a wooded basin, "brimmed like a cup with sunshine." Straight in front, separated only from its base by the dusky Water of Leith, rises a wooded cliff fringed with firs,

a cliff so inaccessibly steep that it is a marvel how such tall trees found root on its perpendicular and sliding soil. They look as if they would topple into the manse chimneys, but tier on tier firmly they climb on, till they reach the top of the well-clothed bluff, and the crows, then as now, caw hoarsely over this sheltered hollow. Behind the manse, and cutting it off from the road (Louis speaks of their phaeton coming to the kitchen door, "for such was our unlordly fashion"), stands the church. Robert Louis Stevenson observed of the manse, with the river lapping its garden, the graveyard on the westerly side looking down on it, that "it is difficult to suppose it was healthful." In those pre-hygienic times people throve under conditions which, to us appear suicidally insanitary.

An ever-increasing circle of villas, boasting, like upstarts, of the superiority of their high and salubrious site, look down on the old manse to-day, from the airy rim of that once secluded den, now a suburb of Edinburgh. Trains run through the dell "where spunkies danced," as Louis believed, taking the residents of the mushroom villas to and

from Edinburgh, a few miles off. Miss Balfour, the "Auntie" of Louis's *Garden of Verses*—

> "Chief of our aunts—not only I
> But all your dozen of nurslings cry,
> What did the other children do?
> And what were childhood wanting you?"—

remembers how little they thought of that intervening four miles; how they returned from their walk to town, recollecting a forgotten errand, set off again to Auld Reekie. Miss Balfour, kept young by her practical interest in all the successive families of nephews and nieces she has mothered, speaks enviously of the ease with which her grand-nieces spin on cycles over the ground. "You would have enjoyed one when you were young," said a visitor. "I'd enjoy one now," she replied, for neither deafness nor failing sight has quelled the sprightly spirit of her race. Mrs. Stevenson, fond of her early home, like all who were reared in that green-lined nest, loved to take her boy back to Colinton, little dreaming the old manse would be portrayed so vividly by the small hand she held.

She was married in 1848, and when she left her

father's roof for Howard Place, if the old proverb speaks true, she need not have given much thought to her trousseau, "for a bonnie bride is soon buskit." All those who recollect her then, speak of her fair looks—looks which lasted to the end of her sixty-eight years; for, besides her clear-cut features, her cultured mind, her genial address, gave her a perennial beauty of expression that outlived the bloom of youth. Her buoyancy of spirit, her complacent serenity in regard to the inevitable, her pleased contentment with her environments —all these Louis learned from her. Mrs. Stevenson was twenty years her son's senior, and it amused and flattered them both that, when going out to dinner together, the servant, judging him to be too young to be married, turned a deaf ear to the names they gave, and announced them as Mr. and *Miss* Stevenson.

There is extant a chalk drawing of Mrs. Stevenson when about twenty-five, and one of Louis done at the same time. He has stiff, old-maidish ringlets, which must have given Cummy much trouble to fix in such sleek order. They are so rigid as to suggest being supported in their position by hair-

pins. These unnatural curls were shortly afterwards shorn. Mr. Stevenson took advantage of Cummy's being off on a holiday to subject Smoutie's lady-like locks to the barber's mercy. Cummy has them now among her keepsakes; very fine yellow hair it is, not yet darkened to correspond with his oriental eyes and complexion. The chalk drawing of Mrs. Stevenson represents her, as Louis remembered her so well, when she chaperoned him to children's parties. He proudly boasted that no child had so pretty a mother as he. When he was a man he recalled how others had heavy, serious mothers who "who sat and looked on," while *his* mother was so girlishly graceful and so lightheartedly blithe that no juvenile guest enjoyed herself with more zest than she. From this picture her refined face smiles down on one. Her smooth hair is braided over her ears in the mid-Victorian style, making a softening frame to her regular features. It is exactly the same face we in Edinburgh, who knew her till so recently, loved. Mrs. Stevenson always impressed one as being richly dressed, though no one could say, when asked, what she wore, so invariably quiet

and ladylike was her taste. Certainly from neither of his parents did Louis take his bizarre fancy for garish colour and fashion in dress.

Mrs. Stevenson's pliableness of temperament was never more clearly shown than in the way she cast off civilization, in spite of her love for everything that was correctly comfortable, and set off to follow her migratory son among uncouth surroundings in distant lands. She went stockingless and clothed in easy garments, and lived that primitive life as if to the manner born. She heartily enjoyed the roughing of it, though the opportunity of basking in the sunshine of her son's presence first induced her to leave the comforts of civilization. Looking over the photographs of these South Sea journeyings, Mrs. Stevenson appeared always decorously attired in her widow's cap, retaining even there her spruce trigness, her hair as usual smoothly dressed, when others had flower-entwined heads and flowing, unkempt locks. "Whenever I saw the camera come to the fore," she explained, smiling, "I seized my cap out of the basket where I kept it ready, and 'preened my feathers.' I tucked in my feet,

though I never went quite barefoot like the others, for I was terrified of stepping on some beast. I never could walk without shoes, but of course I wore no stockings, except when I went to church. They laughed at me, but, however warm, I always put them on for service."

Mrs. Stevenson transplanted herself and all her old home furniture out to Vailima, meaning to settle there for her life, never dreaming, as she said, "to weep the eyes that should have wept for me," but, she added in the same letter, with that unselfish resignation, that determination to see good in everything, "His dear eyes have been saved these tears, and *I must be glad for that.*" In his own words she could truly say, and comfort herself therewith—

> "O stricken heart, remember, O remember,
> How of human days he lived the better part."

Frail in health, as Louis had ever been, it was more than probable he might be one of those creaking doors which are said to hang longest. Mrs. Stevenson herself had suffered from the inclement winds of Edinburgh. Her father, in his

youth, had sought for health in the Isle of Wight, and his grandson, after trying both hemispheres, enviously adds, "whereas he found it and kept it, I am still on the quest."

Two of Dr. Lewis Balfour's children were ailsome in youth, and it appeared unlikely they would resist the effects of the deeply-buried situation of the manse and its overshadowing graveyard. Yet they grew up and went out into the world like the others reared there, and survive to-day, hale and hearty, having passed useful lives in the thick of our too maligned Edinburgh climate. Louis, when grown-up, often tempted providence by outlandish expeditions, unnecessary buffetings with weather, and want of proper comfort. After settling finally in what he thought salubrious Samoa, the lights of his life, which had "been a little turned down," had flared up astonishingly strong again, and it was believed the author had found an El-dorado, where his health would, as his years advanced, increase in strength.

Mrs. Stevenson came back twice to this country from the enervating softness of her son's island retreat to recruit and see her sister, and finally in

1891 took herself and all the endeared belongings of her married home to Samoa.

The familiar furnishings of Heriot Row sailed to the South, where they remain. They were for ever associated with her husband and boy; how often had they watched him when, as he recorded—

> "With my little gun, I crawl
> All in the dark along the wall,
> And follow round the forest track
> Away behind the sofa back."

Mrs. Stevenson fully expected to end her life with her boy at Vailima. His improved health gave every hope for years of useful work before him. His mother never believed he would achieve the "fine success" he craved for in *her* lifetime. Louis always hoped that his end would be speedy when his time came. "If only I could secure a violent death, what a *fine success!*" he writes. "I wish to die in my boots; no more Land of Counterpane for me. To be drowned, to be shot, to be thrown from a horse, aye, to be hanged, rather than pass again through that slow dissolution."

Victor Hugo likens an overwhelming blow to a Waterloo, a slow decay a St. Helena. The 3rd

December, 1894, was a Waterloo to the Vailima household. On none did it fall heavier than on his mother, who had known and loved him longest, who was now a widow and childless, and who had lost a son of whom she had the right to be proud, for she had been the first to foresee the honoured position he would attain to by his pen. She returned to Edinburgh immediately after his death, to the one tie she had left there, Miss Balfour, her elder sister, who had mothered her in her school days. Miss Balfour needed her, so Mrs. Stevenson settled down in Edinburgh, choosing for her new home a house which overhung the valley of the Leith. At first her old friends were afraid to see her, for fear the trials she had encountered since she had left them would have left defacing scars upon her and her wound be still too painful to look on. But she came back and took her former place with unflinching bravery, and the one theme she specially liked to hear others broach, or to enlarge on herself, was Louis. Appreciation of him was balm to her wounds. She had his photographs around her, and from Samoa had brought back one link with Heriot Row, a striking likeness of her

husband, by Sir George Reid, now to be seen in the Edinburgh National Portrait Gallery. That supple nature of hers allowed her to take her place once more in an orthodox Edinburgh drawing-room, and it was hard to realize that she, sitting there in her faultless widow's attire, darning daintily with her capable hands, had gone about stockingless, ridden through forest paths, and sat at feasts with the Samoan chiefs. She said she might return some time to visit that grave on the mountain top where she had seen her son laid. She had always taken an interest too in foreign missions, and she had a longing to work for her Church among the Samoans. So quietly and quickly did she resettle in the North, one almost forgot she had ever been away in such untamed parts. Mrs. Stevenson had a spirit of enterprise in her, a liking to subject herself to experiences, an inquisitiveness as to novelties, and Louis inherited this thirst to taste of the unknown. Mrs. Stevenson never lost her taste for exploring a *terra incognita.* In the last September she was among us, being in the country she expressed a wish to get on a cycle to try how it felt, and write to those left at Vailima and tell

them what she thought of it. There was a wheel put at her disposal christened Dobbin, in the hopes that sedate name would incline it to steadiness. Lithe of figure, straight as an arrow, undeterred by her sixty-seven years, Mrs. Stevenson vaulted on the iron horse with ease, and displayed an instinctive idea of balance. She said she knew she had an inborn notion of equilibrium from the way she had kept her seat all untutored as an equestrian on a flesh and blood horse in Samoa. Not contented only to mount Dobbin, she, barely supported by an anxious teacher, sent him gaily along the road on which he had borne many wobbling beginners. None, however, managed him better than this agile, well-balanced sexagenarian rider in mantle and bonnet, garments which she said befitted her years, but were hampering for this exercise. The second day she careered on Dobbin down a hill, steering well to the middle of the road and going at a pace which left her attendant in the rear. "If people would not think it ridiculous of me, I think I would take to cycling," she said when an upward slope brought her journey to a triumphant finish. "It is delightful. I envy

people I see from my windows at Randolph Cliff whirling across the Dean Bridge."

That same September she visited a lighthouse on a great foreland which was one of her husband's beacons. The keepers received her cordially. They showed her Thomas Stevenson's unsurpassed inventions and his signature on their books. They asked her for her autograph, and expressed their gratification in having seen the wife of one

> "Who early and late in the windy ocean toiled
> To plant a star for seamen,"

and his son proudly boasted,—

> "These are thy works, O father, these thy crown,
> Whether on high the air be pure, they shine
> Along the yellowing sunset, and all night
> Among the unnumbered stars of God they shine."

Mrs. Stevenson quoting these lines among the sounds of winds and wings and solitary cries, observed it was pleasing to her to be honoured and welcomed as Thomas Stevenson's wife; "for of late years," she said, "I have become so accustomed to be known only as R. L. S.'s mother." She reminded us, too, of an incident Louis refers to in his sketch of his father; how a

friend of his was asked in South America if "he knew Mr. Stevenson, the author, because his works were much esteemed in Peru. He supposed the reference was to the writer of tales; but the Peruvian had never heard of Dr. Jekyl, what he had in his eye, what was esteemed in Peru, were the volumes of the engineer."

Mrs. Stevenson, clever and cultured as she was, never wished for any distinctive career of her own. To her it was acceptable to be known either as the wife of Thomas Stevenson (to whom the Germans gave the title of "the Nestor of lighthouse illumination") or the mother of Robert Louis Stevenson. Finding herself reverenced as the parent of a distinguished son when she went to visit Louis at Skerryvore, his Bournemouth home, she was told that the Shelleys had been attracted to him, and Louis had been given by Sir Percy a portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft; and Mrs. Stevenson heard how Sir Percy thought her son was mentally like his father, and that the poet's spirit lived again in R. L. S. This portrait our Tusitala was to look on as that of a spiritual ancestress, from whom he inherited a pedigree of genius; and it hung at

Vailima among Stevenson family portraits of the engineers. Mrs. Stevenson told us, hearing Lady Shelley had called and was alone, she glancing at herself in a glass to see there was no hair awry, went smiling into the room, ready, she said, to be adored as the mother of the man her visitor and Sir Percy flattered and praised. But, when she introduced herself, Lady Shelley rose indignantly and turned from her proffered hand. She accused Mrs. Stevenson of having robbed her of a son, for she held Louis should have been sent to her, that he was the poet's grandson ; but by some perverse trickery, of which she judged Mrs. Stevenson guilty, this descendant of Percy Bysshe had come to a house in Howard Place, Edinburgh, instead of hers at Boscombe Manor. A somewhat parallel case happened to Dr. Johnson on his travels ; for Lady Eglintoune found, says Boswell, that she "was married the year before Dr. Johnson was born, upon which she graciously said to him that she might have been his mother and that she now adopted him, and when we were going away she embraced him saying, 'My dear son, farewell.' Lady Eglintoune, like Lady Shelley, adopted a

"might have been son." Louis Stevenson himself believed he had fallen heir to Robert Ferguson's unhappy poetic soul; while Lady Shelley, according to Mrs. Stevenson, was firmly convinced that she had been defrauded of a son, and never abated in her animosity towards her for this robbery. This, said Mrs. Stevenson, was the only time any one fell foul of her for having given to the world the popular author.

Mrs. Stevenson had early guessed in what direction lay her Louis's road to fame. She fostered his love of writing, and was, with Cummy, the first of his devoted readers. Even if he had never grown famous, to hear her in her latter years speak of "Little Lew" would have drawn listeners about her, for she had the art of telling a simple tale with pathos and humour, which impressed it on her hearers. Her unceasing interest in everything connected with him, her every thought given so wholly to him, made her listeners in her drawing-room, looking adown the valley, realize how great was her love. She, so "austerely led," was never seen otherwise than "well content." If people marvelled at her heartsome blitheness of spirit,

she with her serene felicity replied she had small cause to repine with a happy record of married life to dwell on, and having been gifted with a son whose genius she was the first to appreciate, whose distinguished position in the world of letters was her glory and comfort. In acknowledging a photograph of the plain-faced little house in Howard Place, she wrote: "How I wish I was back in it forty-five years ago! Well, I had a long time of happiness. I have many precious memories left, and I feel that I have much cause for thankfulness, but still my heart cries out for 'my boy.'" Grief never wrung an audible complaint from her. It was her unselfishness which enabled her to face her sorrow and the interest she took in the weal or woe of all around her. To the world, to the sister she tended, she turned a serene, placid face.

She had treasured up all her recollections of Louis from his babyhood. She had kept all newspaper cuttings about him from the days when his youthful efforts first appeared in print. She had his six-year-old dictated MS., an essay on Moses, and his privately printed little booklets, now so

sought after by collectors. Shirley speaks of strolling one long, light evening from his Hermitage of Braid with Principal Tulloch across to Swanston and getting there a volume in which Robert Louis Stevenson's "juvenile contributions to local journals had been carefully put together and preserved. We read them next morning—the Principal in his bedroom before breakfast, as was his way—and we then agreed that, whatever came of it, here was a fresh voice with a note delicate and unborrowed as the lark's. Hardly any one but his mother guessed as yet what was in store; but she was prescient, as mothers are." Among many who visited her for her son's sake came Mr. Barrie, when she was home from Samoa, one winter. He was anxious for her to meet his mother, and Mrs. Stevenson regretted she had not taken the journey to Thrums. Mrs. Stevenson was much amused at the way in which he tried to tempt her to find time to go. If Mrs. Barrie in her loyalty to her own son bore Robert Louis Stevenson a grudge, why, Mrs. Stevenson asked, would she care to see her?

"She would like," answered Mr. Barrie, "to tell

you how I came through the whooping cough, and ask you if your son had any dregs from the measles."

How interesting it would have been to have had a photograph of these two mothers discussing their sons, their books, or their infantine ailments! If Mrs. Stevenson and she had met, it is to be hoped Mrs. Stevenson would have walked in unawares and caught Mrs. Barrie by the hearth we know and perchance sitting with that unholy fascinating knave, Ballantrae. Her piercing but kindly eyes would have scrutinized the handsomely dressed mother of the man whom she feared would have wiled her devoted lad away from her to his tropic retreat. It would have defied Margaret Ogilvy's penetrating observation to have found a fault with her guest's appearance. However blowy the day, there would not have been one hair astray, or however dusty not a speck of travel-stain on her fine black dress. Mrs. Stevenson was always immaculately trim in her attire. Mrs. Barrie would have found the whilom daughter of the manse, with that ready address of hers, eager to listen to Thrums tales,

of honours to a Thrums man, or to a Thrums boy's precocity. Mrs. Stevenson would have envied her hostess having "her boy" there, and doubtless Mrs. Barrie with her quick intuition would have found the Road to that Loving Heart by her sympathy for the mother who loved beyond compare the "only son" granted to her, and who mourned him with a Spartan cheerfulness. Mrs. Stevenson read with an understanding smile of Mrs. Barrie's jealous aversion, her gradual capitulation to R. L. S.'s seductive writing, and she deplored too late, with *Margaret Ogilvy* in her hand, that she had not journeyed to Thrums.

Mrs. Stevenson's absorbing pride in her son was as transparent as her husband's succouring lights which flash out, dazzling in their concentrated strength. Abnormal as it was, there was no vain-gloriousness in it, only pure prideful pleasure undimmed by any small selfish conceits. Whether she was fonder of the author as the new master of romance, the subtle supple stylist, or her boy, "Little Lew," it is hard to say. Often and often she heard, as she sat in "peaceful turret pent," not

the applause of the many who loved his tales, but his pattering footsteps. Even in remembrance that was sweetest music to her. She obeyed his injunctions as she had obeyed his slightest desire she could gratify in life.

> "You too, my mother, read my rhymes
> For love of unforgotten times,
> And you may chance to hear once more
> The little feet along the floor."

Mrs. Stevenson, when she returned finally to Edinburgh from Samoa—

> "For
> It brooks wi' nae denial,
> That the dearest friends are the auldest friends,
> And the young are just on trial"—

liked to be of the audience at every lecture on Robert Louis Stevenson she saw advertised. There were many, for he had given to us a host of life-long friends. To him we owe the acquaintanceship of honest Alan Breck and his companion Davie Balfour, of many a clever scoundrel and bold rascal, of Archie Weir and his "owre true" father; and lastly, that dashing dare-devil St. Ives, who took us over the Castle Rock and led us to further intimate acquaintance with Swanston. Then, be-

sides numerous friends on paper, he gave us these essays full of living words arranged with that felicitous grace of expression of which he was the consummate master. "Folk come here speirin' about young Stevenson sin' he is deid," said the present gardener at Swanston, speaking of pilgrim Stevensonians who bother him with questions; for Thackeray, with his cognizance of human nature, says truly, "We all want to know details regarding men who have achieved famous feats, whether of war or wit, or eloquence or knowledge." Sometimes illustrating these lectures on Tusitala there were lime-light views, and one felt, as Mrs. Stevenson saw before her on the screen a well-known scene, and heard quoted—

> "I gang nae mair where ance I gaed,
> By Brunston, Fairmilehead or Braid,
> But far frae Kirk and Tron"—

it must have been a stab anew for her to realize that, no longer a willing exile in a palmy isle, he lived so that across the waste of waters he would send his voice, and end the verse:—

> "O still ayont the muckle sea,
> Still are ye dear, and dear to me,
> Auld Reekie still and on."

Others felt a lump in their throats when they remembered that he had lain him down with a will. There was no hope now that, some day when a breath of the North came to him, he might be tempted to come home. No more letters, no more books of his could come across the globe to us. The blank was difficult to realize, but all the while his mother sat critical and intent, apparently unruffled by any emotion but her pleasure in hearing her son's praises sung, his death lamented.

The Stevenson Memorial meeting was a gala day to her. She started for the Music Hall not too early, feeling secure of a seat with a "reserve ticket" in her neatly gloved hand. When some one asked if she were going on the platform, she replied emphatically in the negative. She had early Victorian ideas as to platforms being proper only for the sterner sex. She wished to be an unnoticed unit in the audience. The crowd was beyond expectations. Mrs. Stevenson arrived to find every passage blocked, and a surging mass at the main entrance clamouring for admittance. She feared that she, with them, would be turned away; but, as a

forlorn hope, she appealed to a policeman to get her in.

"It's nae use, it's fu'," he said; "reserve seats ta'en an hour ago by folks that had nae tuckets, and they would na gang out."

"I *must* get in," cried Mrs. Stevenson, roused out of her usual calm by despair. "I've a right to get in. I am Robert Louis Stevenson's mother."

"Aye, you've the best right," the policeman replied, and, turning to the crowd, cried, "Mak' way there. She maun get in. She's Roabert Louis's mither."

People who thought themselves packed too tightly to move somehow packed closer, and let Mrs. Stevenson squeeze and wriggle past.

Breathless, hustled, and, for once, her mantle and bonnet a little awry, much against her will the crowd pushed her on to the platform. There she hastened to so literal a back seat that when Lord Rosebery, to add to his tactful compliment to her in the four telling words, "his mother is here," with which he well-nigh began his speech, looked around to bow with courtly

deference to her, he had to pause (and the pause was very effective), and to quietly engage other eyes as well as his own to find to which side Robert Louis's mother had unobtrusively withdrawn.

Mrs. Stevenson was all aglow with the enthusiastic fulness of that meeting. She was visibly overcome by the unexpectedly large crowd and its tremendous enthusiasm. For once her usual calm left her.

"A proud day for her to have a son a mitred bishop," writes Louis in *Our Lady of the Snows*, of one who by "special grace, against usual ordinance," was able to witness the crowning of her child. "It makes one glad they let her in," he adds sympathetically. A proud day was December 9th, 1896 (two years after her Waterloo), to Mrs. Stevenson, and she was thankful for the "special grace" even in the shape of the policeman who ushered her in to see her son, like a prophet, for long without honour in his own country, receive the homage of his native town.

A few months later, with Louis's name last on

her lips, after a short struggle with pneumonia, she died. She was laid beside her husband in the Dean Cemetery, that beautiful burial ground in the west of Edinburgh. From it, secluded by trees from the city, the great castle is seen towering majestically, and round it, deep down a bosky bank, the Water of Leith winds. That humble brown stream lilted a lullaby, in very truth a cradle song, to Mrs. Stevenson at the old manse. It made lasting music in the memory of her only son, who lies afar in that strange mountain grave with the surf booming an incessant requiem at its feet. He yearned to rest among the good Scots clods with familiar stars, true never-failing Northern lights, and the historic hills of home keeping watch over him.

Perhaps the best, nay, the only explanation of Mrs. Stevenson's uncomplaining front in the face of her sorrow, when bereft of that brilliant idolized son, is to be found in the Heriot Row Bible she gave to an Edinburgh church. On a leaf of it, in Mr. Stevenson's hand, is the date of his marriage. Then, again, in it he wrote the date of the birth of Robert Lewis Balfour,

their son. She added to it in her writing the record of her husband's death, and then, when a widow and childless, that of "her boy," their only son. After that last date, she added, from Psalm xxxix. 9, the words which gave the key of her cheerful, silent fortitude when so bitterly acquainted with grief—"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it."

Alison Cunningham

"For all you pitied, all you bore
In sad and happy days of yore,
My second mother, my first wife,
The angel of my infant life."

—*The Dedication to the "Garden of Verses."*

CHAPTER IV

Alison Cunningham

ANOTHER guardian of Louis's childhood was Alison Cunningham. The day which brought them together when he was eighteen months old is worthy of a red-letter record in Louis's calendar. Many a child has had as devoted a nurse as young Louis, but no nurse from her nursling had ever so deftly worded or so widely known a tribute to her care as Alison Cunningham received in the dedication of the *Garden of Verses.* He remembered, when he penned these lines, the "long nights you lay awake and watched for my unworthy sake"; he knew then that his second mother would have followed him across the world, to nurse him as of yore, when he lay ill. The letter she wrote volunteering to go to her laddie he held in his clasp, as if to feel again the

touch of that "comfortable hand" which had soothed away his childhood's sufferings. She well deserved the pretty tribute that her boy thus paid her in remembrance of all the pains she comforted. She gave her whole heart and energies to her charge. To her, as well as to his mother, he owed his happy disposition. He was never thwarted or denied anything that could add to his happiness. Never a complaining word escaped his nurse's lips, and he grew up surrounded by the love of his two mothers. Kept for such long spells in the house, he was more dependent than most on a kindly, patient ruler in the nursery. Night and day the child had to be watched and amused. His active brain supplied an endless series of questions, and he never rested till they were answered. Cummy had enjoyed a solid education such as falls to most of her kind if they have the good fortune to be born Scots. She came of a family of fair worldly means and position. She belonged to the good old days when domestic service was not scorned as menial, when it was considered a more fitting and honoured calling than service behind

a counter. Cummy's education was not wasted. When she and Smout, as he said, spent

> "Happy chimney-corner days,
> Sitting safe in nursery nooks
> Reading picture story books,"

it was a trained as well as a "kind voice" that read to him with ease and expression. No one enjoyed the works he afterwards gave to the world more than the nurse who with his mother, on the nursery floor, taught the wee lad to find, from out of the chaos of letters, C for Cummy or crooked S for Stevenson.

"Cummy," as she had been promptly christened by her small charge, was reared at Torryburn, a village even to-day out of the reach of trains and placidly stranded on the north bank of the Firth of Forth, whose waters lap up to its very doors. It is a village of white houses, red roofs, crow-stepped gables basking lazily in the sun. Torryburn, along with some other of these west of Fife boroughs, was of more importance when the king sat in Dunfermline town. The smaller ships of bygone times sailed up the unbridged

Firth to unload their cargoes at wharves snug under the bield of wooded bluffs.

This west nook of the Kingdom of Fife, facing the sun and protected from the hard winds, is to-day still a green, sleepy hollow, lulled to rest by the curfew, which still tolls nightly from Culross steeple. Cummy grew up in this place, rich with traditions of its past glories, and full of the history and legends of her native land. At her father's hearth she heard the old-time tales of the smuggling days, and all the local narratives of the resurrectionist times. Close to the water's edge, along the fringes of Fife, were many graveyards easy of access to those who plied their ghastly trade. The people, knowing how corpses had been stolen from their resting-place, lived then in dread of their dead being molested. Nevertheless, for all their watchfulness many a boat went off with its gruesome cargo. It was for this reason that Cummy's mother, dying in 1870, ordered she should not be buried among her people in Torryburn kirkyard, but in a town cemetery, where such desecration was impossible. We may be sure in good time young Louis knew

all the stories, true or traditionary, that Cummy had to tell.

She had learned all she could be taught at Torryburn, where a relative of Cummy's, a Miss Drummond, combined dressmaking and school-keeping. Miss Drummond helped her sisters to shape the lasting linsey-woolsey of the day into fashionable gowns ; and while she plied her needle or trimmed a tippet, she heard her pupils recite. It is true that, on the " Burial of Sir John Moore," perhaps owing to her absorption in her sewing, or a dimness of sight, which took in the look of a word and not its exact meaning, Sir John, at Torryburn was buried with his *material* cloak around him. In these dame schools, however, even if they read " material " for "martial," the scholars laid a firm foundation of learning. Alison was a promising pupil, and her parents, to give a finish to her education, sent her off to Dunfermline, four or five miles distant. Alison had to live there in the darkest winter days with some relatives, but she preferred Torryburn, and at week ends she returned home, walking at the tail of the carrier's cart for company. She made light of

the distance in summer, and walked gladly to and fro. Even now she is spare and active, though deafness has shut her off from the world of voices. Mrs. Stevenson and Cummy used to tell little Lew, when he began his school-going, that his lines had fallen in easy times. His guardians had had to rise in the dark and walk eight or ten miles daily for their lessons.

Alison Cunningham never swerved in her allegiance to her tender, ailing boy. In 1870 Louis wrote a dissertation on Nurses, in which he draws a sad (all the sadder because it is true) picture of a nurse neglected by her nursling when he grew up,—she was left alone after having given "her best and happiest years in tending, watching, and learning to love like a mother this child, with which she has no connection, and to which she has no tie. Perhaps she refused some sweetheart (such things have been), or put him off and off, until he lost heart and turned to some one else, all for fear of leaving this creature that had wound itself about her heart." He goes on to picture the Testament she bought for her boy out of her poorly provided purse,

thrown aside, and how, maybe, he passed her in the street, ashamed to recognise the old woman that loved him. Louis as a youth of twenty-one had noted how many of his friends' old nurses were treated, but his had no reason to complain. Her boy to the last did not forget her, always "rememberful" whenever he had a new book of his own to give her. "Mothers," Louis wrote at the end of *Nurses*, "can be brought to feel more tenderly to those who share their toil and have no part in the reward." Cummy had full share of her "reward"—a word her boy objected to. "The world must return some day to the word duty and be done with the word reward. There are no rewards and plenty of duties," he said. To tend him was to her a labour of love, and consideration and attention from his parents and himself was the result of duty done with a heart-whole devotedness. I heard Mrs. Stevenson say that one day, when driving from Cummy's home, she had complained to Louis that she had never had a printed tribute like Cummy's. She reminded him that she too had taken more than her share of the anxious night

watches, and been as conscientious and a
a mother when he was Smoutie as wh
was R. L. S. the favoured author; but
explained that her maternal love and self-sa
went without saying, whereas Cummy's s
were bought. He considered she more th
served any laurels that he could lay on her
In her case there was duty well done an
a rich reward.

Cummy has a house on the south si
Edinburgh, a cemetery, she says, in front
and a madhouse behind her, but her sunn
lour, like her heart, is full of mementos of I
Louis Stevenson. Mrs. Stevenson lately ga
an album with a series of views of place
people connected with their boy. Below
photograph his mother had written a desc
quotation from his own works. There is Sw
in its "bouquet of trees"; there is a port
him as he played at Colinton as "Little Sr
at the manse." Cummy likes to sit by v
as they turn over the leaves, and look
various pictures of that family trio with
she spent her best days. Her own port

there, taken some years ago, and a quotation from the *Garden of Verses* written by her mistress below it. She was pleased, but shook a protesting head, when an American visitor told her she was like Mrs. Stevenson. But there was truth in it. Alison's face is furrowed. She had not the calm, smooth look and dignity of Mrs. Stevenson, but her features are neatly chiselled and of a refined type, like her mistress's. The tears dim her eyes as she comes to the last page, where, among the tangle of the rankly prolific vegetation of the tropics, stands Louis's grave. He had looked at that spot from his study window at Vailima, and wrote of it "as my tomb which is to be," regretting while he praises its lavish Southern beauty, that it was not to be his fate "to be buried in the hills under the heather, and a table tombstone like the martyrs, where the whaups and plovers are crying. My heart remembers how? Ah, by God it does!" Cummy has not that control over her feelings which made many marvel at Mrs. Stevenson's seeming placidness when speaking of her sorrow. Cummy's eyes well over as she points to a piece of moss, which Mrs. Stevenson brought

her from that sacred spot. To be buried far from Scotland and kin seems a terrible thing to Cummy, and she lingers sadly over this last photo before she lays the book down beside other keepsakes. The child's mimic tea set stands on Cummy's table. His aunt, Miss Balfour, gave it to him and that it still survives tells how girlishly gentle "little Smoutie" was. It has a tea-pot, cream-jug, and sugar-bowl of Queen Anne shape, and three cups on the tray, a dainty set all beflowered with tiny pink roses. The cups hold "just a thimbleful," and many a one did his two mothers drink at his tea parties, he playing various characters in his *rôle* as host.

The walls are covered with pictures. Cummy prizes one of Mentone, sent her and signed by Robert Louis Stevenson. Mrs. Stevenson, Cummy, and he had been there on a health pilgrimage. It was Mrs. Stevenson who was the invalid that winter. Leeches had been ordered for her, and unawares, with others, a horse one had been used, and had acted as a vampire. Cummy tells how, uneasy about her mistress, she stole down to her room at midnight and found her strength

far spent. For once Lew was neglected. He wakened and found no Cummy to assure him, nor did she come at his call. Cummy had promptly flung the impostor leech into a fiery grave, rung for help, and despatched a messenger hot-foot to fetch the doctor. Lew, she said, bawled loudly for his nurse, but she on this *one* occasion let him bawl, for she feared that his mother was going to slip away from them. Mr. Stevenson returned next day from London, and, "Honest man," says Cummy, "he was fair put about, and as soon as Mrs. Stevenson was in a fit state he packed Lew and she and I off for eight months to France." Louis, on a visit to Mentone many years after, sent this photograph back to Cummy. "She will say," he wrote, "it's no my Mentone, I ken by the biggin o't"; for houses had sprung up where nurse and child had strolled hand in hand.

There is, in Cummy's parlour, a faded, old-fashioned *carte-de-visite* album, pushed a little in the background because of its shabby binding. It is a mine of reminiscences. It has a series of photographs of Louis from babyhood, and it is

worth while to sit by Cummy and turn the worn pages and listen to her comments as we scrutinize the well-known face. The first is as an infant on his mother's knee. He has laughed and not kept his head still while hilarious, and it is blurred. All the same, in spite of cheeks bulging with fatness, there is a likeness to the Robert Louis Stevenson we knew, the wide-apart eyes very bright and dark, and a certain sly, humorous expression funny to see on the podgy baby when we remember it in the lean-cheeked man. Cummy likes the next photograph of him at twenty months old (Mrs. Stevenson dated them all in her exact way), for it was done after she had found her life's work and been his nurse two months. He is chubby cheeked, but his arms—which, after the dangerous practice of that time, are bare—are wanting in flesh. His fat hands are clasped, and his sleek hair is smoothed over his big brow as he gazes with earnest eyes, with a consequential gravity, rather incongruous in a white-frocked, be-sashed, plump-faced chit. Again at four he is taken, twice in one day. In these two portraits he is dressed in very girlish fashion, for

in those days youths were not immediately plunged into sailor suits. He is wearing a hat which at first gives one the impression that the child standing on the chair in the full-skirted robe must be a lassie, for it is ostrich-plumed and mushroom-shaped and tied under his chin—the comfortable style of hat the Queen patronizes. Altogether he is a refreshingly quaint figure. He is dressed in a blue merino pelisse trimmed with grey astrachan, and an Eastern scarf with the Indian pine upon it keeps his throat warm. "This pelisse," Cummy says, pausing as she scrutinizes the picture, "was made of a remnant." She mentions the shop which was selling off when the bargain was offered. It is a name which is in part extinct — one partner's name still lives in a huge block of building in Princes Street. To Cummy, in the face of its Whiteley-like proportions, it is still the shop where Lew's blue merino was bought. She is, however, rather indignant that such a bairn should be dressed in a remnant, however excellent the stuff. "Mrs. Stevenson always bought the best, and made things last," she said. "I've seen her myself in

a dress I knew was years old looking better dressed than anybody, for everything she had was thorough to the linings." Evidently cloth of gold was what Cummy would have robed him in if she had had her way. She did not think his father's pet name, Smout, was fitting for her boy, and she tells how, when ladies asked him what he was called, the little rascal would look up with mischief in his face and answer "Smoutie." "Like a name for a dog," his admirers said indignantly, "only a dog might be Princie, and a little Prince you are." Cummy quite agreed with this, but Mr. Stevenson stuck to his original Smout. The blue merino, remnant or not, she owns suited *her* Prince well, and from under his hat he glances up with the amused gleam that lights up his face in his baby photograph. A compatriot in years who knew him as a schoolboy and wrote of him so graphically in *Temple Bar*, describes this expression which from first to last was often on his face, yet impossible to catch on canvas and difficult even for the quick camera: "About the mouth and in the mirthful mocking light of the eyes there lingered ever

ready Autolycus roguery, that suggested sly Hermes masquerading as a mortal. The eyes were always genial, however gaily the lights danced in them ; but about the mouth there was something a little tricksy and mocking, as if a spirit that had already peeped behind the scenes of life's pageant and more than guessed its unrealities."

The same day that he was immortalized in his girlish headgear he was taken without this comfortable, queenly hat. The fun in this second photograph has died out of his face, the joke he was sniggling over had exploded. He is staring at the no longer diverting photographer, chubby, but serious. The next in the gallery was taken when he was six and had begun to shoot up into a lank boy. His hair is cropped to a man-like shortness. Cummy needed no longer to try and coax his fair locks into a curl on his forehead, as was then the fashion. His hair was fine for a boy and sleek, always lying close to his head, for it was the hair belonging to a delicate constitution, damp with the dews of ill-health, and fell, when he wore it irrationally

long for a man, in limp locks, giving him a dishevelled look. In this picture, like most photographs done in the fifties, he is leaning on a table. There is a reproving seriousness in his face; no droll conceit had crossed his mind to bring to light that arch expression twice before caught by the camera. His hands have lost their baby podginess, and are nervous, long-fingered. He has a whip in his grasp, which falls slackly down as if toys were not in his line, and he looks pensively ahead. Cummy explains he is in a green poplin tunic, trimmed with velvet. Miss Balfour says it is not green poplin, and the velvet was scarlet; but whatever its colour, it is a tasteful, old-fashioned dress, finished at the neck by a frill of madeira work, which is fastened under the chin by a big womanish bow. Cummy goes over every detail with lingering fondness. She draws attention to its good style. This time it is made of no remnant, it is cut from a pattern blouse, and was his party frock for a winter, and its chicness of sleeve was specially admired. He has boots on and white stockings, which need bracing up,

for they wrinkle over the fleshless legs. "See his bit breekies," says Cummy, pointing to those obsolete garments of white cotton appearing below the short tunic. "That is tatting on them. It was in his mother's trousseau, and real fine tatting too."

In all these photographs of his first years we can see the child is decidedly the father of the man, and we can trace from the earliest one the face of the famed author. The eyes are landmarks which even the disguising puffiness of youth cannot hide. In this album he seems to emerge suddenly out of party frocks and white stockings and tatting-trimmed "bit breekies" into commonplace tweeds. Cummy is no longer mistress of the robes to his majesty King Louis. Her fingers can only fashion him manly shirts and knit his stockings. There is an honesty about these schoolboy photographs which is assurance of truth. There is no touching up, no flattering of plain facts in them. In each he looks gloomily thoughtful, almost sulky, or, as the language of the North alone can describe it, "dour." Perhaps he was not captivated with the camera as of yore,

when his two mothers dressed him in all his bravery, or the chairs he sat on may have been too conventional, and the steadying prong which held his head immovable, annoying; for on none of them is there a ghost of the quizzical speculation which ever and anon shone out of his eyes and lurked round his mouth. There is a brooding glumness in them all, which was unlike his future nature. Maybe he already felt he had to brave these equinoctial gales of youth, before he settled into the groove for which he instinctively felt he was best fitted.

There are other photographs of him on Cummy's wall, cabinet size, which would not fit the now out-of-date *carte* album. He is there bewigged as Robert Louis Stevenson, advocate, and there is the suspicion of a playful duplicity in the would-be wisdom-framed face. There is a profile of him fresh from the *Inland Voyage*, a pleasant reminiscence for those who knew him at that time. His velvet coat and flannel shirt with Byronic collar certainly look better on paper than they did among his better-clothed Edinburgh comrades. He has more the look of

his mother in this vignette than in any other, except that in which, having "solved the great mystery," he is lying at rest under his nation's flag in the hall at Vailima, with his trusty Samoan servant watching by his dead master like some faithful dog. The first profile was taken when he was in the heyday of such strength as was accorded to him, and in both the well-defined nose, the oval face recall Mrs. Stevenson. Yet in another photograph this "lad o' pairts" seems to be a Stevenson, and a very sullen one. He is standing by his father, a boy of thirteen or so, one hand resting on the good man's broad shoulder, the other tucked into his pocket; an angular boy, wanting in that naturalness of pose which mark his photographs when a child. Mr. Stevenson's Skye, a doormat of a terrier such as Leech drew for *Punch*, is curled up beside him. The engineer is sitting with that reliable look of his in his firm face, his head turned at the angle and his gaze fixed on the same object as the thin boy's. The foreheads and the wide-apart eyes of father and son are singularly alike, but Mr. Stevenson's mouth is resolute yet tender, and

below it is a determined chin, while Louis has an undecided fulness about the lips and has lowered his head so that he looks almost chinless. "All our other features are made for us, but a man makes his own mouth," writes Oliver Wendell Holmes. Louis's mouth in all these school-boy photographs is unformed. When he merged into a velveteen jacket and odd attire, a subtle, incredulous smile settled on his lips, full of interrogative wonderment.

There was little likeness between father and son when the latter grew up, but that photograph of Mr. Stevenson and Smoutie just caught an affinity of look. Mr. Stevenson, broad of build, square-faced, ruddy-coloured, with the strong yet lenient compassionate lines about his firm-shut mouth, seemed to have no relationship with the ill-thriven, wan-faced, narrow-chested stripling, and Louis never, even when beyond his twenties, looked more than a boy in his teens.

Cummy points out with doubled interest the photographs of her laddie her mistress loved the best. Mrs. Stevenson, with a mother's instinctive pride, fancied those which made him appear

strongest and straightest. Because of its emaciated look she disliked even the photograph of one of the too few portraits done of him from life. The artist, Signor Nerli, while globe-trotting visited Samoa, because he wished to see the author who had made the coral-built island into a peopled garden by his creative presence. The eyes in this portrait are good. They have the droll light in them which has a suspicion of satirical amusement. He looks as if he were taking a farcical survey of life, as if he agreed with Horace Walpole, "If the angels have any fun in them, how we must divert them!" The travesty of life when he thought over it gave him often this almost cynical questioning expression. In this portrait, which he sat for when very weary, there is a limp listlessness sad to see, but painfully real. Often when looking spare and fagged, but never complaining, this droop of delicacy was terribly apparent. There is too much of a sneer about the mouth. The "*tricksy mocking*" expression Mr. Baildon mentions exactly describes this doubting, incredulous look. Still it is a good likeness, and many who knew Robert Louis Stevenson

in his Edinburgh days remarked how it recalled him to their minds. The best likeness of Louis, in my opinion, is in the Edinburgh Edition, volume xxi., "from an original kindly furnished by Mr. John S. Sargent, A.R.A., a platinotype enlargement from a roughly printed little amateur photograph taken by Mr. Lloyd Osbourne in 1885." The long oval face is there full front, and he is looking up with those strangely wide-set eyes of his, as if pausing a moment in thoughtful doubt, pen in hand, before he jots down for us some craftily worded observation, the very prospect of which is bringing a smile to his lips. The interrogatory but satisfied and bright look in the eyes is altogether life-like. There is a good likeness of him in the frontispiece of *Vailima Letters*, etched by W. Strang, after a photograph by Falk of Sydney, but to my thinking the eyes in it are too round. Louis had eyes peculiar in form. They were long, Japanese, almond-shaped. People who have been laughing sometimes half shut their eyes, and Louis's gave one the impression of eyes half-closed and beaming with fun from their depths. "The old pythoness"

he speaks of, who told him his fortune, stopped in her soothsaying, and looking at him exclaimed, "Black eyes!" This, he said, was not true, but they were so dark as to be easily classed as black. They were never sad, always radiant and genial, as if brimful of life and sunshine. Judging by the numerous photographs of him, beginning from babyhood, he was constantly before the camera's recording eye, though he seldom sat to be immortalized on canvas.

Besides photographs of him in abundance in Cummy's room, there is a line of his books shoulder to shoulder on her shelf.[1] She has a book-case at the end of her parlour, where many volumes ousted from drawing-room favour, when their outward gayness faded, and others given her at Christmas, have now retired. Those on the topmost shelf were all given to her by the author, beginning with what Mrs. Stevenson used to call her eldest grandson, namely a copy of *An Inland Voyage*. In Cummy's copy, written in a clear hand on its ribbed pages, is a private

[1] Some of these she lately parted with.

foreword in prose of what was to appear later in the *Garden of Verses.*

"MY DEAR CUMMY,—

"If you had not taken so much trouble with me all the days of my childhood, this little book would never have been written. Many a long night you sat up with me when I was ill. I wish I could hope, by way of return, to amuse a single evening for you with my little book! But whatever you may think of it, I know you will continue to think kindly of

"THE AUTHOR."

Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes comes next — "To Alison Cunningham, from the Author." The *Garden of Verses* has its envied dedication in print, but on her own copy is "Alison Cunningham, Bournemouth, 1885, R. L. S.' Others follow, *Kidnapped*, *Underwoods*, etc., all to Cummy from "her boy, the Author," or "her laddie, R. L. S." None have so precisely written an inscription as *An Inland Voyage.* Like an only child or a first-born, overweening care had

been bestowed upon it, and Louis's writing there is a model of prim exactness.

Last on the row comes the posthumous *Weir of Hermiston*, and on its title page, in Mrs. Stevenson's writing, is "To Alison Cunningham, in memoriam, Robert Louis Stevenson, from his mother." Every one of his books sent by himself, Cummy had. She lent them to friends, and, as is too often the fate with loaned books, she lost them. Over these volumes, these photographs, some old letters, his baby caps worked by his mother, Mrs. Stevenson and she used to gloat with full hearts, Cummy's eyes glistening with tears, Mrs. Stevenson composed and cheerful. Cummy has letters her mistress wrote to her when she went back for her holidays or to nurse some of her sick kin at Torryburn. Mrs. Stevenson was a faithful amanuensis. She wrote down all Louis's babble, all his messages to Cummy, while, like the guinea fowls he was likened to later, he kept crying perpetually, "Come back, come back." He knew by her word pictures (for Cummy, like her mistress, has the art of sketching people and scenes) every

one at Torryburn—a place he longed to visit with his "Comely Cummy," as he called her. At the end of one letter he signs himself, "Your loving Robert Louis Stevenson," but fearing this then seldom used title sounded stiff and estranged, he ordered his mother between the "loving" and his baptismal name to insert "little son," knowing these two short words would insure his adopted mother's return. She has his hair in an envelope beside these letters written from Howard Place, and many stray memorials of her laddie. A little red velvet Testament he gave his mother on her birthday lies on Cummy's table. He had borrowed two shillings from Cummy for its purchase, and together they chose it in gay scarlet and gold binding. Cummy wrote his inscription in it, and for many a year "Little Lew's Mamma" used it.

Cummy still wears crape on her dress for her nursling—not ornamental sorrow, for his mother and she wore their hearts upon their sleeves, and he who ran might read engraven thereon the name of their mutual little son Louis. This crape Cummy will now never remove. She told

her mistress, on the last visit she paid her, that she had worn it over two years for her son. "Don't take it off, Cummy," replied his mother, touching it gently. Cummy has a hospitable fashion of coming to the door to speed a parting guest, watching them along the street, ready to give an answering wave if they turn; but when her old mistress, grown by reason of long acquaintance with a mutual love and mutual sorrow into her best beloved confidante, came to leave, Cummy always accompanied her to the tramway car, loath to part with the friend of forty-four years' standing. Mrs. Stevenson kissed Cummy's sad, perturbed face, bade her go home and not catch cold, and Alison Cunningham stood looking lingeringly after her, till she turned and kissed her hand and waved to her a reassuring farewell from the tramcar step. She was always "wae" when her mistress left, but that day little thought she would not meet her again. Cummy enviously thinks of her meeting with her laddie, but, drying her tears, she smilingly adds, "It's not for long we'll be parted now."

Infant Days

"The course of our education is answered best by these poems and romances where we breathe a magnanimous atmosphere of thought and meet generous and pious characters."

—*Books which have Influenced Me.*

CHAPTER V

Infant Days

LOUIS STEVENSON may well be considered a fortunate boy with his judicious father and mother and that other "angel of his infant life who made his childish days rejoice." He was hedged round by love and care. He had always, at least, one of his two mothers to entertain him or to be an eager listener to all the queer questions and thoughts which so throbbed in his brain. His guardians had many tales to tell of their charge. He held despotic sway, they firmly believed their king could do no wrong, but from all facts gleaned he must have been a well-behaved, seldom a troublesome little chap.

If he had not been gifted with health, he had an inheritance which helped to balance the loss—contentment. Sweet content and a zest in life

helped him thoroughly to appreciate the nursery clime, even though he had to spend long months in the Land of Counterpane. Weary months they would have been to many, but looking back on them with those searching eyes of his he could truly call them "*pleasant.*" The cheerfulness and patience of his two mothers flooded the dawn of his life with sunshine, and the remembrance of these palmy days was ever delectable to him, for as Sydney Smith says, "If you make children happy, you will make them happy twenty years after by the memory of it."

One of his earliest recorded desires was to write. When a petticoated boy, between three and four, he slid his hand into his nurse's, signalled to her to lock the door, put his finger to his lips to enjoin secrecy, and then whispered as loud as a stage conspirator, "I've got a story to tell, Cummy — you write it." "He just havered," says Cummy, smiling at the recollection of the young author, whose eyes glowed so darkly in contrast with his then childishly yellow hair. Cummy entered sympathetically into the conspiracy, and with barred doors the maker of

tales dictated. "I wrote down every word he told me," says his amanuensis. "It pleased the bairn, and when he was asleep I read his havers to his mamma by the nursery fire." These infantile productions were all destroyed, but at six he wrote a history which still survives. His uncle, David Stevenson, offered a prize, open to all the junior members of the family, for the best essay on Moses. Louis was all agog to compete. "But I can't write," he cried in sudden despair. "You can dictate, and I will write," said his mother; "and not one word will be put down but what you say, just as I write letters for you." The child, flushed with excitement, set to work on this his first real composition. These were the days when he wore the green poplin tunic, and a pretty scene it must have been, his fair young mother patiently waiting till he had shaped all his conception of Moses into sentences. To sit still was always foreign to his mercurial nature, and when but six he composed acting all the time the scenes and characters. He drew childishly funny illustrations of the Israelites crossing the Red

Sea, carrying very unwieldy portmanteaus, and smoking cigars of prodigious size. Despite the illustrations he did not win the prize. As a small boy his inclinations seemed to lean more towards drama than literature. He liked to see his puppets move. Paper puppets they were, but cut in human shape, and made to converse according to his fancy. *A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured* tells of these "kaleidoscopes of changing pictures" he so enjoyed. His pen, like a wizard's wand, transports us to the enchanted past, to that Golden Age and brings us within ken again of childhood's age of illusion.

During one winter when he was house-bound he had a Stevenson cousin to bear him company. They started a game of "islands." Robert Louis's was "Noseingdale," Robert Alan's "Encyclopedia." Great doings there were in these lands. Foreign foes invaded them, and the islanders in turn attacked other kingdoms. The two Roberts vied with one another in inventing the most electrifying or grisly news, or finding the strangest monster on their property. R. L. Stevenson had in his cousin, R. A. M. Stevenson, one whose

creative power bid fair to eclipse his own. So Louis had to cudgel his brains to keep Noseingdale on a level with Encyclopedia.

Regiments of soldiers, when an invasion was imminent, were dispatched by a friendly power to assist Encyclopedia, and passed on the way battalions bound for Noseingdale. Noah's Arks, which had been cashiered as childish, were ransacked and gave up antediluvian monsters to prey on the inhabitants. Balloons, long before St. Ives had to look on high for means of escape, rescued Robert Louis Stevenson's heroes from bewildering dilemmas on his "supposed" isle. When not actively engaged, round the nursery table, in making earthquakes or volcanoes shake the islands to their foundation or in repelling the assault of the numerous foes which warred against them, the boys drew pictures of what went on on their sorely afflicted dreamland properties. Islands always had a fascination for Louis Stevenson. They were so handy for an ambush or a pillaging ground for pirates. It is a pity that a few copies of *The Encyclopedia Budget* or *Noseingdale Daily News* were not preserved. There

was not a dull day spent by the rival islanders, for their rulers kept them in a red-hot ferment between subterranean upheavals, bloody battles, dragons, and revolutions requiring martial interference.

Indeed, to their creators and the creators' guardians they were Treasure Islands, for the incalculable amusement they afforded was worth a mint of money when chimney-corner days were the doctor's orders. This kindred spirit, Robert Alan, was the cousin alluded to who, when he grew up, developed the same objection to the strait waistcoat of convention as Louis did, and proved that the latter took his uncontrollable Bohemianism from the seemingly staid Stevensons. They were well matched as boys, having both a rich gift of imagination. In *Child Play* Louis mentions how he used to bury his porridge under sugar and pretend it was a land smothered under snow, while Bob submerged his bicker of meal under milk, while they exchanged views as to how the blizzard or the inundation progressed. Such proceedings seasoned plain fare into an appetising banquet.

Louis certainly had one great advantage in the springtime of his life; for, to use his own expression, he had been "young in youth." When years had winged their flight, he could recall every detail of his childish play, and not only that, but so indelibly was it engraved on his tenacious memory, so dexterous his pen, that he was able to wake in his readers the long-forgotten charm, the queer imaginings of their nursery days. While Cummy or his mother read, he always pranced about, for he marvelled how his elders could calmly sit and retail adventures. He had to make the chairs into heroes, the coal box into a castle which held the captives, the table into an enchanted island which was reached in an inverted stool, the rocking chair into the horse which galloped madly with him to bear news of battle. He had always to enact a fight, with a pillow for his adversary, or storm a supposed citadel, and personally lead the van. When he stood breathless brushing his hair back from his overheated brow, Cummy looked anxiously on her agitated laddie and begged of him to "Sit down and bide quiet for a bittie." She would

rack her brains to find some story not needing much action on the part of the hero, or coax him to knit a garter which he remembered grimed with the age it attained while growing under his 'prentice hand.

Some cousins of his have not forgotten how, when this only child came to play with them, his brain fomenting with unexpressed ideas, he at once set to work to utilize their nursery full of children, for to have other small people to make believe with was a fine chance of fun for him. He drilled them into opposing armies. He transformed them into pirates or moss-troopers, and from one pursuit to another his nimble imagination flew, and he made them execute his designs while he staged his properties. He left his companions exhausted by the many parts they had played, while he yet saw possibilities for another live scenic display. He continued to expound his plot volubly, his ashen cheeks rosy, until he was waylaid by Cummy, who conveyed the excited child home, dreading lest he should pay the penalty for this over exertion by a sleepless night.

When the last embers died from the sunset, if Louis were not in bed he peered into the wintry gloaming, waiting for the lamplighter. As Louis watched "for the term of his twilight diligence," when he had knocked "another luminous hole in the dusk," like many another in the city he repeated the old doggerel jingle which helped the genius of the Lamp on his way, beginning—"Leerie, Leerie, light the lamp." Louis, in the *Garden of Verses*, tells us he considers his father's house is happily situated, for he boasts he had "a lamp before his door." When that home light was lit the child rattled on the pane, or if he caught the man's eye kissed his hand to him. Louis went through paroxysms of apprehension for fear that the man of light would forget the white-faced watcher who longed to salute him, for he pathetically begs,—

"And O! before you hurry by with ladder and with light,
O Leerie, see a little child and nod to him to-night!"

Louis quickly learned to recite, and knew the metrical psalms and his Shorter Catechism sooner than most. He tells how he repeated "I to the hills will lift mine eyes" to his grandfather,

hoping with one of those serio-comic aspirations of childhood that the good divine would award him an Indian picture on which his eyes had been covetously cast. Anything pronouncedly gay in colour fixed the attention of the boy, whose eyes dancing with light seemed to have absorbed the benediction of the sun. "Nothing was more unlikely than that my grandfather should strip himself of one of those pictures, love-gifts and reminders of his absent sons," says Louis, recalling this scene. Something in the lad's demeanour touched his kinsman, and breaking through his usual reserve, he took the little fellow up and kissed him. It speaks well for young Louis's responsiveness of heart that, forgetting his disappointment about the gaudy-coloured picture, he was "struck by this reception into so tender a surprise that I forgot my disappointment."

The twenty-third Psalm gave him food for play, and he had his own localities in which to see and enact it. The pastures green he decided were some fields bordering a road near Howard Place, known as Puddocky. The Water of Leith

running below a bridge forms a deep pool overhung by some willows. Seagulls go there and float, on the heavy still days preceding a storm, white creamy dots on the chocolate-coloured water. There were sheep in those willow-fringed fields awaiting the butcher's knife. These were to Louis the flocks which the good shepherd tended. "Death's dark vale" for him was also on this road. It was a tunnel below a railway bridge, and has to be passed through before Warriston Cemetery is reached. Surrounded by graves, a few stunted pines like hearse plumes hiding the bank, the dank, drippy tunnel is rather a fearsome passage for children to face. Louis, however, with a tall rod in one hand and a crook-headed staff in the other, stepped boldly through this lugubrious entrance, but he liked, all the same, to hear Cummy's steps behind him. He rejoiced when he got out into the full light, and supported by the staff (Cummy carrying the improvised rod till the return journey) he marched along "fearing none ill." He played through life on the skirts of death. About the verge of the valley of the shadow his feeble steps seemed

always to hover, but he looked down into the unfathomed depths smilingly and inquisitively. His rod and staff throughout his life was a readiness to meet his fate with lips and eyes full of hopeful sunlight. In his last Evensong he says he understands—

"So far have I been led, Lord, by Thy will;
So far I have followed, Lord, and wondered still.
* * * * *
The night at Thy command comes.
I will eat and sleep and will not question more."

"'Be good yourself, make others happy,' was," his mother said, writing those lines of his on a quilt, "the gospel according to Robert Louis Stevenson."

Along with the psalms Cummy drilled into him the Shorter Catechism. The questions and answers learned by rote remained firmly implanted in his mind, as they do in that of every Scot who had learned it in youth. But Louis, meditative and inquisitive, must have puzzled his green brains over the meanings of these well-planned sentences he learned with parrot-like exactness. Cummy told me she read to him MacCheyne; "just bits he'd understand, you know." Her

laddie mentions this MacCheyne without much respect. He had evidently too much of this author on the strictly kept Sabbath, which he says made a "grim and serviceable pause in the tenor of Scotch boyhood days of great stillness and solitude for the rebellious mind, when in the dearth of books and play, and in the intervals of studying the Shorter Catechism, the intellect and senses prey upon and test each other." He preferred the *Pilgrim's Progress* and its woodcuts, and tales from Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, of those who were loyal to death to "Christ's ain kirk and covenant." Cummy thinks she read the Bible three or four times through to him before he could read, so with his keen memory he must have started life mighty in the Scriptures. Some passages as a child fastened on his memory. The words, "The only son of his mother, and she was a widow," he kept murmuring, varying the intonations of pity he threw into his voice. Joseph and his brethren was a story he liked to re-tell, and Cummy writes: "With a very serious face he would repeat the story of the Shunammite in 2 Kings iv. The twenty-fourth verse he used

to dwell on with great emphasis, especially the middle clause to end of verse." The fifty-eighth of Isaiah, his nurse informed me, was "Lew's chapter"; and when he had acquired the mastery of print, he read it to her. "I think I hear him yet," she says. It was a curious chapter to fix a child's attention. There is, however, in the sixth, seventh, and eighth verses the rough outline of the "gospel according to Robert Louis Stevenson," as his mother said, or rather the gospel as practised by him. Cummy tells how when, after his marriage, "her laddie" was spending a summer at Pitlochrie, he rushed out on a man who was unmercifully beating a dog. "It's no yours, is it?" said the owner. "No, but it's God's dog, and I won't have it beaten," replied Louis, remembering "the part he had chosen," "to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free."

Certainly, between his two mothers and the family theologian, he was what in Scotland would have been called "weel brocht up," which included a thorough grounding of Presbyterian precepts. Those who knew him in after years, kicking

violently against the pricks of civilization, scoffing at the dogmatism in every creed, especially of the one he had been reared in, could hardly have pictured the strictness of his up-bringing. When he was far away from the old land, waves of recollections of the teachings he received in his youth came surging over him. With Thackeray he could say :—

> "If in time of sacred youth
> We learned at home to love and pray,
> Pray Heaven that early Love and Truth
> May never wholly pass away."

His father we know preached a capital layman's sermon. His son preached a Christmas one, and with him example also went before precept. "Kind deeds and words—that's the true blue piety; to hope the best, and do the best, and speak the best," wrote Louis. Cheerfulness was another doctrine he believed in. "Give us to go blithely on our business," he prayed of a morning. "Help us to play the man; help us to perform the petty round of irritating concerns and duties with laughter and kind faces; let cheerfulness abound with industry."

The land of story-books was to him in childhood his favourite pleasure-ground. Through the sleepless nights, the days in bed, when he had his toys about him, and sent his leaden army marching among the bed-clothes, "through the hills," and his fleets "all up and down among the sheets," he liked to be read to. "Cummy, read to me from the Bible," he would order when he could not sleep, and Cummy obeyed, till rest came to him. In the morning when he awoke he would again issue his standing order: "Read to me, Cummy." His nurse, knowing well that his fears, with the shadows of night, had flown away, and the "Old, old story" would be laid aside till he again traversed the "uneven land," would ask with well-pretended ignorance, "What chapter will I read to you, my laddie?" But his fears dispelled by the rising sun, Louis no longer a saint would be, and with the uncanting honesty of tender years, answered, "Why, Cummy, it's daylight now; put away the Bible, and reach over for that new book of Ballantyne's." He speaks of some of the magnified, often unspoken, fears of childhood. "We no longer see the devil in the

bed-curtains, nor lie awake to listen to the wind." These are compensations for the shades of the prison-house closing in on him. Cared for as he was, bogles, darkness, the fears of traversing the north-west passage, terrified him—the highly-strung child, full of emotions. Cummy found him one night, when beset with fears, kneeling, praying for the Holy Ghost to come and comfort him, and finding his qualms not allayed, he bitterly complained that no "peace of God" came at his asking to soothe his fevered frame. He liked, as a child, the "rare and welcome silence of the snows." Cummy would lift him up out of bed, and draw aside the blind to show him the world in white.

But when the spring days came, his playground was oftener the manse garden than the nursery. His mother liked to see him running in the garden she had romped in, and showed him where to secrete himself, or hunted for him when he was a wee four-year-old hider in the French merino pelisse. He would snicker with suppressed delight when Mrs. Stevenson and Cummy went peering about, and never saw the obviously

hidden child till he rushed out at them, jubilant at his successful deception. "These days were like green spots in my memory," says Cummy, thinking of him singing by the water door, "How far is it to Babylon?" Having transformed the garden into every conceivable land recorded in the atlas or fairy-books, hob-nobbed with Bruce and Tell and Ali Baba, he and his two friends, after a thousand-mile gallop, for the finish of the day, at

> "Last drew rem—a weary three—
> Upon the lawn in time for tea,
> And from our steeds alighted down
> Before the gates of Babylon."

Mrs. Stevenson and Cummy going over these times, talking of Smoutie at the manse, remembered not the sad but only the happy days of yore, when they hoped little Lew was going to grow up well and strong. But whether he was condemned to the Land of Counterpane, on chimney-corner days or garden days, he saw something bright in all.

> "The world is so full of a number of things,
> I am sure we should all be as happy as kings,"

he sang. He was petted, not spoilt. He lived in a world of admiration, and he imagined every one, like his home circle, was his bounden slave. He liked playing chieftain in Samoa. He was lord of all he surveyed in Howard Place; his words listened to, his whims pandered to. He was an uncommonly happy-natured, happy-starred small boy.

Schooldays

"Give me again all that was there ;
Give me the sun that shone ;
Give me the eyes, give me the soul
Give me the lad that's gone.
* * * *
Glory of youth glowed in his soul.
Where is that glory now ?"

—*Songs of Travel*

CHAPTER VI

Schooldays

LOUIS began his schooldays when he was eight. While still in tunics, more on account of a notion of his own than from any wish of the rulers of his infant days to push him on, he thirsted to go to school. He looked out of his window and saw the little lads and lasses trotting home from lessons, very purposeful in their gait, or romping and merry. He wistfully eyed them, begged to join their ranks, to run along with a satchel of books, or drive four-in-hand teams of cravat-harnessed fellow-scholars home before him. His entrance as a pupil at Mr. Henderson's preparatory school, which was then near to Louis's second home, No. 1, Inverleith Place, was delayed till he had grown out of his green poplin tunic, and

both the Stevensons and Mr. Henderson had moved uphill nearer Princes Street. Louis had lived three years at Howard Place, and four at its opposite neighbour; then 17, Heriot Row, became his fixed Edinburgh abode. Shortly after settling there he had an attack of gastric fever. There is an autobiographic glimpse of this illness in one of his poems, "The Sick Child." The fevered boy, tossing restlessly, begs assurance from his mother that the looming shapes seen by his delirious eye do not mean him ill. The mother, hiding her anxiety, explains to him the darkness will not harm him, for there are

> "Nothing but lamps the whole town through,
> And never a child awake but you."

How often then did Mrs. Stevenson gladly hail the first glimmer of dawn when her vigil ended. Knowing that soon the sun must shine blue on the window blind, she tells her son,—

> "Out in the city sounds begin;
> Thank the kind God the carts come in;
> Then shall my child go sweetly asleep,
> And dream of the birds and the hills of sheep."

In *Nuits Blanches*, an early paper, he again re-

calls that weary time: "If any one should know the pleasure and pain of a sleepless night, it should be I. I remember, so long ago, the sickly child that woke from his few hours' slumber with the sweat of a nightmare on his brow, to lie awake, and listen, and long for the first signs of life among the silent streets. Over the black belt of the garden I saw the long line of Queen Street, with here and there a lighted window. How often my nurse lifted me out of bed and pointed them out to me, while we wondered together if, there also, there were children that could not sleep, and if these lighted oblongs were signs of those that waited, like us, for the morning. It was my custom, as the hours dragged on, to repeat the question, 'When will the carts come in?' and repeat it again and again. The road before our house is a great thoroughfare for early carts. I know not, and I never have known, what they carry, whence they come, or whither they go. But I know that, long ere dawn and for hours together, they stream continuously past. It was not for nothing they made the burthen of my wishes all night through. They were really

the first throbbings of life, the harbingers of day. You can hear the carters cracking their whips and crying hoarsely to their horses, or to one another; and sometimes even a peal of healthy, harsh, horse laughter comes up to you through the darkness. There is now an end to mystery and fear."

This illness withheld him from being enrolled as one of Mr. Henderson's pupils, but eventually he was strong enough, and like many another Edinburgh citizen, eminent to-day, he was well grounded there. India Street was very close to Heriot Row, but Louis's uncertain health kept him from continuous attendance. Near as this seminary for small boys and girls was to his doors, the regularity of the routine began to gall the young student before the corners of his multiplication card were well dog-eared, and the newness gone from his neatly covered primers. He never took a prominent place in his classes, or Cummy would have had an array of his prizes on her shelves to-day, arrayed beside a book Mrs. Stevenson won at school. Louis followed on his good father's lines, and studied only what he

liked, worked only in his own way. Cummy's constant Bible readings (and the long night watches gave ample time for such) must of themselves have been a liberal education. Making his paper puppets act, inventing deedful days on Noseingdale, and having stories read to him, filled up his winter school days more than regular lessons. The fancy for school quickly palled. He found he could not romp as his sturdy comrades did, and they refused to be drilled into highwaymen or Indians as he wished. Then, near as school was, he had to go tied to Cummy's apron-strings, for if it were wet or cold she "changed his feet," as she said, for fear of a chill. The others, with the candid cruelty of children, jeered at their molly-coddled companion, jeers which stung the thin-skinned Louis severely. His conversation, which amused his elders and later his contemporaries, was not congenial to his small schoolmates. The gilt was soon rubbed off the delights of school.

But a good mother is the best of teachers, and he, having two at his disposal, stowed away a deal of knowledge. The books Cummy read

him she says she, too, enjoyed heartily. She had a leaning to Ballantyne, in preference to Cooper or Mayne Reid. He had a reader in sympathy with his taste, for his slave loved her task.

He rubbed against other young folk in the manse garden, but like his schoolmates they were not to his mind. He was too rashly eager to win his spurs when playing "French and English," too eager to dash over the boundary to gain loot or rescue a prisoner. His physical strength was not equal to the tasks he set himself, and he was captured by the enemy and upbraided across the border by his countrymen for headlong stupidity. The other boys were too rude and hardy for Louis. He liked better to watch "the gardener at his toil," or play with girl cousins, who were diverted with the frail child, and found his polite, considerate manners a pleasing change. In the manse garden he was hero, patriot or robber, till, wearied of play, he sauntered off to listen to the moil of the mill. Summer and Colinton were synonymous to him. But the "herd of men" ended his duties, and the manse

sheltered a stranger race, so the Stevensons spent some summers at the seaside, where Louis went "Crusoeing"—a word, he says, "which covers all extempore eating in the open air." North Berwick was then not so villafied a place as now, and he wandered around tasting of an adventurous gean, whose hardihood to grow on the salt-encrusted cliffs in the teeth of searching winds commanded his respect. He lunched at Tantallon on "sandwiches and visions"—visions of Marmion or Douglas in that hold. His cousin tells that "games of pirates played in the open were a constant source of amusement among the sand wreaths to the west of North Berwick, where we were wont to play together, and the exploration of old castles and ruins was one of his greatest pleasures."

Another year he spent an autumn at Peebles. Though frail of frame he was full of spirit, and many romantic and historic scenes he imagined, and was fain, when strength and chance allowed, to enact At Peebles Louis had a pony, and his two companions were also mounted. He christened their steeds in rather

a startling manner. The girl's snow-white palfrey, a safe mount fitted to carry a somewhat timid rider, was Heaven. Her brother's black steed was Hell; and his own, being a midway colour, was Purgatory. The boys loved to ford the Tweed, and were always choosing roads which led them across the river. No sooner were they over, than despite the protests of Heaven's rider, they would change their route and return by the watery way. Some days Louis bade them assume they were moss-troopers out a-rieving, and every flock of sheep they met doucely coming from market, they uproariously hailed as their spoil. Other times they played at being pursued by the English, and were forced to fly full speed for the shelter of their own peel tower. Louis foresaw an ambush in every broomy scaur which had to be dashed past. Heaven, who disliked this erratic pace, lagged, and forthwith became a wounded comrade, whom chivalry forbade them to desert. The boys loved to gallop through the toll bars, pretending they were running a blockade; but the girl, being of a law-abiding nature, was anxious to pay tax, and soothed the toll-

keeper's wrath, as he shook his fist at the black and brown pony riders, jeering at his defeat. When, wearied of being caterans, or the stragglers from that fatal Flodden, they raced along the Queen's highway, Louis shouted, "Hell wins, I say; don't hold Heaven in, you stupid. No; I believe Purgatory will beat you both" The visitors that summer at Peebles must have often met this capering trio, led by the spare-framed boy on the brown, who, with face inflamed by excitement, resurrected many a bygone borderer, and fought their battles over again.

In winter he found much to explore round his native city. Craigleith quarry, within a mile of Edinburgh town, attracted him on holidays, for its hillocks tufted with gorse, the green water far in the abyss, made fine exploring ground. Then the "stones chattered to him," and told him tales of long ago—of villages now swept away, or a house with old trees around it, wedged into a street, was a story to him. Many a red-tiled "nugget of cottages," spared by the encroaching town, did Louis discover when he was a schoolboy. "The memories of an Edinburgh boy are

partly the memories of the town. I look back," he says, "with delight on many an escalade of garden walls, many a ramble among lilacs full of piping birds, many an exploration in obscure quarters that were neither town nor country; and I think that both for my companions and myself there was a special interest, a point of romance and a sentiment of foreign travel when we hit in our excursions on the butt end of some former hamlet, and found a few rustic cottages embedded among streets and squares."

He was eight or more before he took to reading to himself. With a slave at command to read when he wished, he had no need to hurry himself to learn, precocious as he was at mastering words in print. But the thirst for knowledge was strong within him. His constant cry was, "Tell me more." Cummy ransacked her brains for further tales from out the storied past wherewith to amuse him. Louis's wife wrote Alison Cunningham lately that Louis had told her he liked his nurse's narrations more than any book she read to him. But his appetite was insatiable, and he was often baffled by being told, in answer

to questions, that when he grew clever he would read for himself and find out. The spirit of inquiry strong within him spurred the lagging schoolboy on. One evening "of heavenly sweetness," deserted by his companion with whom he had been building sand castles, he went at sunset among the firs, a book of fairy tales in his hand, and began to read to himself as he strolled. Then, he says, he knew he loved reading. Cummy's favourite, McCheyne, was left in the lurch. He found his mother had been educating his taste, and, though his father's library was a place of "some austerity," he found there life-long friends. Four old volumes of *Punch* he revelled in, and he was astonished to find in after-life that the "Snob Papers" were written by big Mr. Thackeray, and not by the hook-nosed, deformed humorist, Mr. Punch. He also tasted of the Master of Romance's *Guy Mannering* and *Rob Roy*, and new worlds of entertainment opened up. The *Arabian Nights* he read, he says, "in the fat, old, double-columned volumes with the prints. I was just well into the story of the Hunchback, I remember, when my clergyman grandfather (a

man we counted pretty stiff) came in behind me. I grew blind with terror; but instead of ordering the book away he said he envied me. Ah! well he might!"

During his tedious convalescence after the fever he consumed a deal of literature. He was read to, of course. "I listened for news of the great, vacant world, upon whose edge I stood; I listened for delightful plots that I might re-enact in play, and romantic scenes and circumstances that I might call up before me, with closed eyes, when I was tired of Scotland and home, and that weary prison of the sick chamber in which I lay so long in durance." *Robinson Crusoe*, Mayne Reid, and a book called *Paul Blake*, were his favourite peeps beyond that sunny room at Heriot Row. When he learned to enjoy reading to himself, he was like a sheep long pent in a small fold, turned into endless and rich pastures to browse at will. It was then his education really began.

In 1863 he was enrolled as an Academy boy in one of the biggest and best Edinburgh day schools, a junior rival to the High School where

Scott was educated. Louis was at first proud of his advancement. The school lay down hill from his home, and he ran off to his task, rasping his clacken[1] on the area railings as he went, a noisy trick he afterwards made a hero of his indulge in. Louis's clacken was only worn by this rasping. He did not join the outdoor pursuits of the boys. The playfield near by with the green mound marking where the bow butts had stood in days of yore saw little of him. Even the yard round the school, where clackens were put to their orthodox use in brief play intervals, had no attractions for him. He cared for none of the games with which the active boys filled their leisure, so he was little known by his contemporaries. When he wanted exercise he strolled alone, and as the houses spoke to him he was not so solitary as he seemed. The Academy is close to Silvermills, where Davie Balfour met Alan Breck before they made a dash for the sea, where they heard what Louis himself calls that

[1] The clacken is a wooden racket dear to Academy boys, and usually carried in the other hand from their books handy for amusement or war.

piece of living Scots—the story of Tod Lapraik and his fiendish dance on the Bass Rock. Silvermills once saw the precious ore which gives it its name melted in a mill on the humble Water of Leith, and a village sprang up to support its workers. To Louis, who passed by it on his schooldays, it was not an uninteresting suburb of temporary sheds and workmen's flats, but a little community far from the city. "Besouth of the mill-lade in a scrog of wood," where St. Stephen's church now stands, Louis's hero and part namesake found "the place and the hour and the talking of the wate infinitely pleasant." The mill-lade, bickering and surging busily, was often viewed by a tardy schoolboy, and before his eyes the unsightly houses and yards faded, and he saw it as it used to be when the silver from "God's Blessing" mine was worked into shape there. Out in Samoa he remembered what he had conjured of its past when passing at a dawdling pace to his studies, wondering what the place had looked like before the old town had become too small for Edinburghers. Quite unconsciously then he relished the pleasure he

depicts in his Dedication to *Catriona*, of following "among named streets and numbered houses the country walks of David Balfour." Sometimes, wearying of passing St. Stephen's daily, he would go to the westernmost end of Heriot Row and trot down Church Lane and imagine it again a thorn-edged loaning, leading from Stockbridge to the West Kirk. He never forgot these talks with the past, and he could minutely chronicle everything his eyes had lit on when a boy. His "Misadventures of John Nicholson," which appeared in a Christmas number, *Yule Tide*, illustrates this. It owes its reappearance in the Edinburgh edition to Mr. Foulis, of Messrs. Douglas & Foulis, Edinburgh, who reminded the editors of its existence. Its wonderful local colour had made a deep impression on him. Louis locates John Nicholson's house on the *south*, the dull, side of Randolph Crescent. The north side has a wide outlook to the Forth, but John's dreary home is put in a sunless corner. Louis did not forget the crows who built in the crescent garden, as their ancestors had done when their tree-top nurseries were in

the wood of Drumsheugh. In this story of John Nicholson there is a murder, out at Murrayfield. Mr. Baildon—whose recollections of Robert Louis Stevenson as a schoolboy in for *Temple Bar*, March, 1895, I have already quoted—read the story in *Yule Tide*, and identified his house as the scene of this tragedy. Murrayfield, being out of town, had, on Saturdays, attractions for the schoolboys. Louis remembered it, and painted it as it would seem on a dreary night, not as a happy holiday house. Mr. Baildon, entering into correspondence with his friend, who had then journeyed to Samoa, reminded Louis Stevenson that he had been so unkind as to leave a dead body in the Murrayfield dining-room. As it was long since he and Louis had met, he said he thought the least the author of the crime could do by way of atonement was to come back to Edinburgh, not only to give them an opportunity of renewing their intercourse, but to give Louis the opportunity of removing the haunting corpse he had deposited on his friend's hearth. This last imperative reason for his return mightily tickled the fancy of R. L. S. in Samoa.

One amusement Louis entered into at the Academy. That was the starting of a school magazine in which he had an editorial interest. *The Sunbeam*, as it was called, was a manuscript magazine. If some one came across this collection of the editor's blood and murder contributions, written in his boyish hand, what a find it would be! Louis, as usual, when riding a hobby, was in thorough earnest over it. The other contributors fell off, or did not circulate the one copy, but he stuck to it with determined diligence. There was one number with a coloured illustration in it, a portrait of one of his cousins in lesson hours, his tasks pushed on one side, blissfully ignorant of the presence of a master who, tawse in hand, is looking over the boy's shoulder.

Louis never took any forward place in his classes. His health kept him a not unwilling victim at home. Then health again sent him and his mother abroad in the spring. Even in summer he was irregular in his attendance, for the family was often away from town, and Louis found crusoeing more instructive than journeying

by an early train to school. For a short time he was at a boarding-school near London, but his father passing through on his way to Mentone removed Louis, and together they journeyed to join Mrs. Stevenson in the Riviera. Mr. Stevenson was wont to say he preferred his son to grow up a healthy idiot rather than a sickly genius, so Louis's boarding-school experiences were decidedly brief.

From 1864 to 1867 he attended a Mr. Thomson's school, of which Mr. Baildon, who met Louis there, says, "I do not think there were at this little seminary more than a dozen boys, ranging in ages from nine or ten to fourteen or fifteen, and our intellectual calibre varied fully as much as our years. For some of us were sent there for reasons of health, and others because they had not made that progress with their studies which their fond parents had hoped. We had no home lessons, but learned, in the two or three hours of afternoon school, what we were expected to remember next day." Ill-health, not genuine backwardness, sent Stevenson there, and he was no longer burdened with heavy tasks to study

in the evening. His father disapproved of school books and school tasks. Mr. Thomson's plan, free of the drudgery of home preparation, met with his approval, also with Louis's. His friend Baildon and he found that they had ample time to worship at the shrine of literature. Louis had a den in the top of the house in Heriot Row, and the two boys there hatched plots for work. Deacon Brodie's history had early caught Louis's fancy, and in 1864 he showed his friend a drama he had written on it. Louis did not desert old friends or the fancies of his youth even on paper. Deacon Brodie was not forgotten, and was re-written later with Mr. Henley's collaboration. He may not have acquired much examination-passing knowledge at Mr. Thomson's, but there is no doubt he learned at that period a vast deal out of school hours. He made few friends at any of his schools. His delicacy and his dislike of boisterous boyish games cut him off from them. He was a solitary lad, but to his love of seclusion we doubtless owe a deal, for then was the seed-time to the harvest of ideas of which we reap the benefit. He had travelled much in his school

days, and he travelled with observant eyes. Though he was lonely, he was no recluse. Early he enticed enjoyment out of what he called the "task of happiness." When among surroundings that pleased his sunny, responsive nature, he was a life-loving, gay-hearted lad.

Spring Equinox

"Do you remember—can we e'er forget?
How, in the coiled perplexities of youth,
In our wild climate, in our scowling town,
We gloomed and shivered, sorrowed, sobbed, and feared?"

—"To my Old Familiars." *Songs of Travel.*

CHAPTER VII

Spring Equinox

"AT sixteen we should be men," said Louis to his schoolmate, Mr. Baildon, when they were rambling together one Saturday, talking of their futures. His comrade, looking back across the waste of years and recollecting this boyish statement, adds, "He, of all mortals, who was in a sense always a boy!" Every one of the readers of his "verses" or his stories must feel that he has awakened anew in them, even from long-buried slumber, the charm of their childhood. Mr. Barrie says, "He was the spirit of boyhood tugging at the skirts of this old world of ours and compelling it to come back and play." But as a lad in his teens he was more serious of face, more troubled of spirit than when years had winged their flight. In his school-

boy photographs this tristful puzzled look clouds his expression. Nevertheless, as he himself said, writing of his own experience, "It is good to have been young in youth, and as the years go on to grow older. Many are already old before they are through their teens; but to travel deliberately through one's ages is to get the heart out of a liberal education." The "gloom of youth," when "in the palace porch of life," he "huddled with chimeras from within," was stamped on his face. But all his sulky looks melted away when he grew out of his teens. Merry of soul he was, and merry of soul he remained to the end. When he wrote *Treasure Island* he was a man of thirty-three—he wrote it with a boyish zest straight from his heart. He found, he said, when reading chapter by chapter at Braemar to his family that his step-son was not his only boy listener. "It seemed to me," he writes, with that sane critical judgment of his, "as original as sin. I counted on one boy. I found I had two in my audience. My father caught fire at once with all the romance and childishness of his original nature. His own stories that every

night of his life he put himself to sleep with dealt perpetually with ships, roadside inns, robbers, old sailors, and commercial travellers before the era of steam. He never finished one of these romances. He, lucky man, did not require to finish them. But in *Treasure Island* he recognised something kindred to his own imagination, it was *his* kind of picturesque, and he not only heard with delight the daily chapter but set himself actively to collaborate. When the time came for Billy Bones's chest to be ransacked, he must have passed the better part of a day preparing on the back of a legal envelope an inventory of its contents, which I exactly followed, and the name of Flint's old ship, the *Walrus*, was given at his particular request." Louis unconsciously here pays his own powers a pretty compliment, letting us see how his intimate knowledge of what would please and interest a boy resurrected in his grave father the boyishness of old. And Mr. Stevenson was not alone in thus returning to this second childhood. In the preface to the translation of *Treasure Island* into French, it is stated that Mr. Gladstone once returned home

from the House of Commons and, by chance, picked up the book. He soon became entangled in the seductive mesh of its plot, read on to the end, and found he had lost his night's sleep in the pursuit of Treasure. Mrs. Barrie, we know, refused to go to rest till she saw how the hero laddie got safe out of the apple barrel.

Louis thoroughly enjoyed the planning and weaving of these tales of adventure. When young he was withheld by sickness from active participation in stirring deeds; but when he was free to do as he listed, with as much ardour in his thirties as if he were still in his teens, he sailed among tropic Ultima Thules and tasted of the life after which he had yearned for formerly. But when he was finishing his schooldays in Edinburgh, and wearying to imprint an exploring foot on the trackless desert of his future, he was, unhappily, depressed by the seriousness of the art of living, which he vowed was the most difficult of all the arts—an art for the teaching of which no provision is made.

He had been pleased with the conversation of his *dramatis personæ* in the shape of tin soldiers

and those coloured paper figures which slid on to his mimic stage in tin grooves called spoons. He made a toy theatre with a stage two feet deep and nine inches high, and the soldiers were played with round the nursery table or kept him company in bed. Their actions, when he wrote them down, did not seem so full of vigour and reality as they had been when first he conjured them up in his mind. He realized then that he could never rest until he could transfer his thoughts into fitting words, and he was a hard task-master to himself. He knew the bent of his inclinations, but before him loomed the hereditary seat in his father's office. He was proud of the work which his father and the others of that strenuous family had accomplished, but he felt that he was forced to flee the labours of his sires.

> "I must arise, O father, and to port
> Some lost, complaining seaman pilot home,"

he sang; but it was not by the Stevenson works or by their beacons, piercing the darkness, that he accomplished this vow. By the flashes of his pen he lightened the way on the

sea of life to many. He knew he had no aptitude for the engineer's trade. He knew this as a boy when by the sea he saw his father, ever thinking of his profession, "pass hours on the beach, brooding over the waves, counting them, noting their least deflection, noting when they broke. On Tweedside or by Lyne or Manor, we have spent together whole afternoons; to me at the time extremely wearisome; to him, as I am now sorry to think, bitterly mortifying. The river was to me a pretty and various spectacle; I could not see—I could not be made to see—it otherwise. To my father it was a chequer board of lively forces, which he traced from pool to shallow with minute appreciation and enduring interest. It was to me like school in holidays; but to him, until I had worn him out with my invincible triviality, a delight." This "engineer's voluminous handy book of nature" was one which Louis could never read. His Eastern-looking eyes saw differently from his father's Norse grey ones. Ever before him Tusitala saw the office stool. The life such as his grandfather had led in the olden days when the lighthouse

towers were being founded and their lamps first lit was attractive enough, full of adventure, sailing, riding, wreckers, and storms. But Louis knew that his unconquerable gipsy fancy must have its way. "It is an evil age," he deplores, "for the gipsily inclined among men. He who can sit squarest on a three-legged stool, he it is who has the wealth and glory." He gave up all thoughts of the former to avoid the ledgers and the office; but he, like his kinsmen, was of the "ready and the strong of word," and he determined to cultivate this talent of language which lay dormant within him. He had in him, too, the doggedness which made these kinsmen such victorious fighters against the encroaching seas. Mr. Baildon, who read as soon as they were written Louis's schoolboy literary efforts, says, "There is no sign in these early attempts of anything premature or precocious, and nothing can be truer, in spite of his early bent towards letters, than that his success was the fruit, as he himself alleges, of persistent industry and indefatigable perseverance." Louis Stevenson determined to master what he called the "kittle art" of writing, and as a schooboy knew that he

had before him a sore task to mount his Hill of Difficulty.

He had to begin his ascent in the face of paternal discountenance. Till well up in his teens his gipsy inclinations had been in abeyance. He was amenable to discipline and amenable to orthodox Edinburgh life. As a small boy he had enjoyed being dressed by his two sisters, and was a show child at juvenile parties, franker than his comrades, with courteous manners, an utter absence of Scottish gaucherie, and a strong wish to dance and talk, and be pleased and pleasant. Even as a schoolboy, unlike others of his years and nation, he went to parties with a good grace and good manners. There was no trouble then about getting him into evening dress. Other boys had to be threatened into velveteens and kilts, and sulked in corners on their arrival at the festive scene. A host of Louis's in the Academy days remembered him as the nice boy who came in to dance with his youngsters of an evening, executing his steps with all the airs and graces of a dancing master, and talking to his elders like a sage. "The little Frenchman" his

hostess called him, so polite was he, so gay. He liked fine clothes in these days, and was particular as to his appearance, envious a little of the boys who donned the garb of old Gaul, for he ever had an eye for bright colour and regretted he was too ill put together to wear a tartan kilt. He travelled much in his boyhood, when he was forced to follow the swallows in search of the sun, and says his senses were alternately stunned and quickened by the novelties he saw. He had read and observed more than most boys of his years, and he was free from all insular prejudices. About the time that he went to Mr. Thomson he began to feel that he was shut up within the Bastille of civilization, and the sense of imprisonment galled him. The feel of the fetters changed him into a sedate boy who did not care to join other lads and lassies who played in the gardens in front of Heriot Row. When the thrushes and blackbirds began to sing in the shrubberies, when back-street children, as sure as the days lengthened, span tops, and played hop-scotch on the pavement, these gardens began to fill with young folk from Heriot Row. The boys

climbed trees and held high revels aloft, played cricket on forbidden stretches of sward, defied the gardener, and encouraged the girls to follow them over the borders.

Louis never joined these neighbouring children at their unruly sports. He noted when the flowering currant and tender greening began to appear among the dull-leaved, winter-enduring shrubs, and listened amid the grey solemn town for "the premonitory notes of the bestirring birds," sounds pleasant to his ear in the silence before dawn. He disliked the other bipeds of his own species who played in these well-wooded, green-turfed gardens. He disliked their noisy games. He felt that "shades of the prison house" were closing more and more oppressively in on him, and he had no elbow-room. He was too much in leading-strings yet to see hope of escape. He went off to corners of the Princes Street gardens and ruminated under the shadow of the Castle rock, where no boys came and asked him to join in their brawling play, or, worse still, jeered at him for refusing, knowing he was physically unable to cow them into order or accept their challenge to fight.

Far away from these disturbing elements he could talk in comfort with a rare friend, or ponder according to his fancy, while looking over the transformed valley. He, the "consistent idler," had begun his literary task. "Sooner or later," he said at Vailima, "somehow, anyhow, I was bound to write a novel. It seems vain to ask why. Men are born with various manias; from my earliest childhood it was mine to make a plaything of imaginary series of events, and as soon as I was able to write I became a good friend of the paper-makers. Reams upon reams must have gone to the making of *Rathillet*, *The Pentland Rising*,[1] *The King's Pardon*, otherwise *Park Whitehead*, *Edward Daven*, *A Country Dance*, and *A Vendetta in the West*, and it is consolatory these reams are now all ashes and have been received again into the soil." This cremated *Rathillet* was written when he was

[1] "*Ne pas confondre.* Not the slim green pamphlet with the imprint of Andrew Elliot, for which (as I see with amazement from the book lists) the gentlemen of England are willing to pay fancy prices, but its predecessor, a bulky historical romance without a spark of merit, and now deleted from the world"

fifteen. Though he was then and ever after so severe and fair a critic of his own works, his two mothers were vastly proud of these boyish attempts. His father never heeded Louis's education. He was well pleased that his son was not brilliant in his classes, for he knew he was busy in his own way. A book was his chosen companion. Mr. Stevenson let him wander at will through his own selected library, where Louis says, "the proceedings of learned societies, some Latin divinity, encyclopædias, physical science, and above all, optics, held the chief place upon the shelves, and it was only in holes and corners that anything really legible existed as by accident."

Twice Mrs. Stevenson had two short pieces of her son's printed for private circulation. She lived to see these little booklets fetch more than their weight in gold. A manuscript for which he received £3 3*s*. was lately unearthed and sold for £26.

Mr. Stevenson pooh-poohed the adulation accorded to the boyish author by his mother and nurse, so when praise came from his firm-set lips,

it was all the sweeter. *The Pentland Rising* was one of these immature booklets, not in reams, but in the reduced form, which Louis mentions in a note already quoted. *The Charity Bazaar* was another. This was written for a sale of work held in Mrs. Stevenson's drawing-room for the benefit of some foreign mission she was interested in. The booklet was sold in 1896 for £25. A second-hand bookseller told me of this fancy price, adding, "I don't believe his mother had £25 worth of work on her drawing-room table." I repeated this to Mrs. Stevenson, who was astonished at the figure *her* book, as she called it, fetched nowadays; but casting her mind back thirty years, she added, "Indeed his mother had more than £25 worth of work at her Charity Bazaar, for I remember I made £75, not counting Lew's book, which sold for 6*d.* a copy."

In 1867 Louis's easy-going schooldays ended. That year was a memorable one in the annals of the Stevenson family, for it was at that time that they bought Swanston Cottage, that favoured spot, "a green fold in the lap of the Pentlands." Mrs. Stevenson and Louis found seeking health in

the South irksome. Mr. Stevenson felt depressed when left alone in the grim North. Summers had been passed at the seaside, at Tweedside, and various haunts within range of Edinburgh, so that the engineer might spend week-ends with wife and son ; but such an arrangement did not satisfy Mr. Stevenson. He wanted a home within easy reach of that office which his son so dreaded. Mrs. Stevenson knew the restful quiet, the pure air, of the green ridge of hills which guards Edinburgh on the south, and which looked down into the chimneys of the old manse at Colinton. She had always thriven under their sheltering shadow, so Swanston was seen, liked, and bought. All who have read *St. Ives* know Swanston as it was when the Stevensons first made it their spring and summer home—a place to go to for rest and change even in midwinter.

Once upon a time the Edinburgh magistrates had built a cottage at Swanston, a cottage to which they might retire when worn out with the affairs of the city. In *Picturesque Notes* Louis tells the history of Swanston when under the rule of the civic dignitaries. "The dell was turned

into a garden; and on the knoll that shelters it from the plain and the sea winds, they built a cottage looking to the hills. They brought crockets and gargoyles from old St. Giles's, which they were then restoring, and disposed them on the gables and over the door and about the garden." They planted their pleasure grounds with trees, they swathed the house, decorated with church quarried stones, in clematis, and the Stevensons reaped the harvest of the long-dead bailies' planting and building. They lived there constantly from March to October, and in course of time the old house *St. Ives* knew had to be enlarged to suit more modern notions of comfort. With its sunny frontage, its immunity from the sweep of the scathing east winds, its nearness in point of distance to the town, its retiredness from all town bustle, though within sight of the city's towers and steeples which lie like an anchored fleet at the base of Arthur's Seat—the place suited the Stevenson family admirably. None loved it more than their wandering child, who by his magical memory was enabled to retrace his "numerous footsteps" when he willed, to see again,

from across the wide world, his Pentland home nestling like the ewe buchts among the broom of the Cowden-knowes "in the lirk of the hill."

Swanston is some three miles from Edinburgh; but the houses, "the new folds of city" that Louis saw "glitter," increase yearly. They have all but invaded Shirley's Hermitage, and marching over its secluded valley, are rapidly advancing to Fairmilehead. Still even to-day Swanston so determinedly turns its back on Edinburgh, and looks up to the scarred brow of Caerketton, that it refuses to see the advancing tide of the city. The one o'clock gun from the Castle keeps the Swanston clocks correctly timed. The nightly bugle blown from that Castle too reaches it when evenings are still, or the winds blowing in that direction. Otherwise Swanston hears nothing of the neighbouring town—hears only the sheep bleating and the peewits crying, as with a swish of wings they pass nigh the house. Sometimes the plaintive wail of the gulls, driven inland by stress of weather, or forced, like many an honoured Scot, to follow at the plough's tail to earn a meal, break in on the hillside quiet with their husky

sea voices. The old house of Swanston, once the grange of Whitekirk Abbey, is close to the cottage, a bleak building exposed to the winds, for its founders sought no "lirk." Its nearness does not disturb its more recent neighbour. The voices from the clachan of cottages gathered round the older house, the bustle of life from the farmyard, toned by distance, sound pleasantly on the ears of those in the garden that Robert Young tended.

Louis's books are all full of autobiographical glimpses. We can trace whence he drew foundations for a plot, backgrounds for a story. Wandering on the uplands, hearkening to the weird cry of the whaups, or to the wind "austere and pure" whistling in his ears as it whistles in the shrouds of a ship at sea, the Pentlands were to him the historic ground where the Covenanters made their stand. His first history of them (the one that consumed so many reams of paper) was suggested to his mind by the monument to those who stood by their creed, which lies between Colinton and Swanston, and to which, when he was at the Old Manse, he walked. When Swans-

ton was his home his legs were longer, and he went further afield, and so perhaps saw the grave in the hills, "Sacred to the Memory of a Covenanter, who fought and was wounded at Rullion Green, November 28th, 1666, and who died at Oaken Bush the day after the battle, and was buried here by Adam Sanderson, of Blackhill." This martyr was a westland man, and he made his companion promise to bury him on the ridge where through a gap in the range there is a peep away to his well-loved Ayrshire. The lonely hills for the lonely Louis were peopled with the makers of history.

At Swanston he had studies for his pen before his window. Robert, the gardener, "was lowly, and a peacemaker, and a servant of God." Then the shepherd, whose bellowing commands ordering Louis to "c'way out amang the sheep," at first hounded the youth from his snug nooks on the braeside, till, as he says, "I skulked in my favourite wilderness like a Cameronian of the Killing Time, and John Todd was my Claverhouse, and his dogs my questing dragoons." But the trespassing young ruralist stuck to his haunts, and

"Wi' sober heart,
For meditation sat apairt,
When orra loves or kittle art
Perplexed my mind."

He learned in time not to fear John Todd, and before long the queerly assorted pair became close friends. "The oldest herd on the Pentland" was full of tales of his "curlew-scattering, sheep-collecting life." The student sat "weel neukit atween the muckle Pentland knees," with his books, though he confesses he read little, and listened eagerly to his whilom enemy, John Todd. "He was," Louis explains, "a wayfarer, and took my gipsy fancy." Louis owns that John and Robert were never particularly friendly one to another—Robert was too conventional, too even grooved—but he would not dissociate his two Swanston friends. In 1894 he writes from Vailima about the Edinburgh edition: "I think the old gardener has to stay where I put him last. It would not do to separate John and Robert." These days of idle lounging on the Pentlands, though Horace or Montaigne lay unopened beside him, were days in which, according to Thoreau's

reasoning, Louis grew. But these growing days were in the summer-tide, when he learned much listening to the shepherd's tale under the hawthorn. There were winter days in town, and, his schooling over, he was entered at Edinburgh University. He describes himself at this period as "a certain lean, ugly, idle, unpopular student, full of changing humours, fine occasional purposes of good, unflinching acceptance of evil, shiverings on wet east-windy mornings, journeys up to class, infinite yawnings during lectures, and unquestionable gusto in the delights of truantry."

Mr. Baildon comments on this description. "Stevenson called himself 'ugly' in his student days, but I think this is a term that never at any time fitted him. In body he was assuredly badly set up. His limbs were long, lean, and spidery, and his chest flat, so as almost to suggest malnutriment, such sharp corners did his joints make under his clothes." Another contemporary student, writing in a daily paper at the time of Stevenson's death, recalls him as "a thin, pale-faced youth, with piercing eyes, ever in a hurry, cigarette in mouth and muffler round his neck, and with loose

locks which suggested an advisable early interview with a skilful barber." At this period he was perturbed, discontented, rebellious, and as his expression was moulded by his feelings he was not so far wrong in his verdict of "ugly." These were the days when he leaned on the parapet of the North Bridge and enviously watched the trains gliding off "on a voyage to brighter skies. Happy the passengers who shake off the dust of Edinburgh, and have heard for the last time the cry of the east wind among her chimney tops. And yet the place," he adds, "establishes an interest in people's hearts; go where they will, they find no city of the same distinction; go where they will, they take a pride in their old home." Remembering how he felt, chained and trammelled in the city of his birth, he sympathised in *An Inland Voyage* with the omnibus driver at Mauberge, who "had a spark of something human in his soul, whose bones thirsted all the while for travel." Louis had, like many, "aspired angrily after that somewhere else of the imagination where all troubles are supposed to end." It was at this period, too, that he could sympathise

with Ferguson, the poet, whom he calls "the poor white-faced, drunken, vicious boy . . . my unhappy predecessor on the causey of Auld Reekie. I believe Ferguson lives in me, I do. But 'tell it not in Gath.' Every man has these fanciful superstitions coming, going, but yet enduring; only most men are so wise (or the poet in them so dead) that they keep their follies for themselves."

Stevenson, loitering at college, with the visions of the harness of an engineer awaiting him, and longing all the while for the collar work of literature, was in the full blast of the equinoctial gales of youth. This spring hurricane was hard to weather, but he steered his course out from among the breakers in an obstinate, headstrong way, and became, in the words of his friend Mr. Henley—

> "The master of his fate,
> The captain of his soul."

"On my tomb, if ever I have one, I mean to get these words inscribed: 'He clung to his paddle,'" Louis said in his first book, *An Inland Voyage*. In this watery journey, the *Arethusa* had

borne him gallantly down the Oise, till it rushed below a fallen tree, and then, the canoe absconding, like Absalom's steed, left her skipper entangled in the branches. "Death himself had me by the heels," he wrote, "for this was his last ambuscade, and he must now personally join in the fray. And *still I clung to my paddle.*" The paddle with which he plied his course in life, with which he steered into our hearts, was in reality his pen. He clung to it despite adverse currents, and wielded it moreover with a boyish gaiety of spirit which showed his heroic pluck. "Gladly I lived," he truly sang.

When he left school, however, he was not allowed to use the paddle he eventually handled so well. While yet in his teens the pattern idler was sent to view the practical part of engineering. He certainly made an effort to give his father's profession a trial. He went to Anstruther, where the Stevenson firm were building a breakwater. It was hoped that he would glean engineering experience in this Fife village. "What I gleaned I am sure I don't know," he exclaims; "I had already my own private determination to be an

author; I loved the art of words and the appearances of life, and *travellers*, and *headers*, and *rubble*, and *polished ashlar*, and *pierres perdues*, and even the thrilling question of the *string course* interested me only (if they interested me at all) as properties for some possible romance, or as words to add to my vocabulary." He was most industrious when off duty. Then it was that he wrote the cremated Covenanting novel, *Voces Fidelium*, and dialogues of a dramatic character in verse, also committed to the flames. There was no blunting the eager edge of Louis's curiosity, and among his engineering experiences none pleased him more than descending in diver's dress to the foundation of the harbour that was being formed. He enjoyed that submarine visit, and in *Random Memories* he has given us a glimpse of what he viewed out of the distorted-eyed helmet. During this walk with the guide he had bribed to accompany him, he swayed like a weed, and had dizzy, muddleheaded joy in his surroundings, grabbing at the fish which darted past him. "This experience was," he says, "one of the best things I got from my education as an engineer." The

outdoor side of engineering life found favour in his sight, but he complains that he or others "with a memory full of ships and seas and perilous headlands and the shining pharos, must apply his long-sighted eyes to the petty niceties of drawing, or measure his inaccurate mind with several pages of consecutive figures." The most comfortable gold-lined office would not tempt this freedom-loving youth within its doors.

His meagre attention to his engineering studies came to his father's ears. Mr. Stevenson was annoyed, too, at his son's rapidly developed Bohemianism. Louis, suffering from an inquisitiveness which often led him into mischief, had a fancy for all sorts of strange amusements and associates. He rebelled against all orthodox entertainments, and could seldom be cajoled into dress clothes, or persuaded to mix with his equals in age and social standing. He would not even dress himself in a seemly style. Nothing but the oddest, shabbiest garments, peculiar in cut and colour, would he figure in. His father conformed to rules and conventionalities in a peaceable, law-abiding manner. His aim was to avoid

attracting observation, as he was wishful to go about his business as unostentatiously as possible. Louis's tastes were in striking antipathy to those of his quiet father, for Louis was vain, although he was not conceited. He weighed and judged his intellectual powers and faults with a searching saneness, and his gifts, his achievements, his honours, never made him vain. It was a forgivable vanity his. It grew out of a wish to be appreciated and pleasant. One sees its like in children. They will seize a tea cosy and put it on their heads, or don a pair of spectacles and march into a room, brimful of expectancy at the laugh they hope will greet them. Louis's vanity was such that one can only smile at it, it is so innocently apparent. Louis loved to give and receive surprises. His stepdaughter tells how he would pin in noticeable places, verses he had written as birthday or home-coming greetings. That was when his quaint whims were treasured as coming from a man of genius. In his Edinburgh days he made no verses, but in their place his puerile affectation of oddness was his ruse to attract attention. He and Professor Blackie were

somewhat akin in their childish stratagems to feed their child-like vanity. They both became enamoured of their eccentricities, which sprang in both cases from the same peculiar state of mind. The Greek professor's well-known plaid in which he paraded Princes Street, the straw hat and dressing-gown he wore in his home, were very becoming costumes, much more pleasing than those of his truant student with his incongruously assorted habiliments. These two Scotsmen had a gay Gallic vein in them which made them overleap national shyness, and this ingenuous vanity and the irresponsible playfulness in their sunshiny natures made them play a *rôle* all their own.

Louis, in a letter telegraphic in its brevity, gives a summary of this period of his life: "I was educated for a civil engineer on my father's design, and was at the building of harbours and lighthouses, and worked in a carpenter's shop and a brass foundry, and hung about wood-yards and the like. Then it came out I was learning nothing, and, on being tightly cross-questioned during a dreadful evening walk, I owned I cared for nothing

but literature. My father said that was no profession, but I might be called to the Bar if I chose. At the age of twenty-one I began to study law." That was doubtless a very dreadful evening walk, but people are apt too often to consider Thomas Stevenson a dense, short-sighted man for thus trying to thwart his boy's wishes. A great deal has to be said on Mr. Stevenson senior's side. His wisdom in insisting on Louis becoming an advocate bore good fruit. It gave the plunging, restive youth, who was then an impetuous, unbroken colt, like to gallop himself lame with eagerness, a taste of the disciplining curb. It gave him a line of steadying, wholesome routine to follow, and meanwhile he had time to gain more tolerance and insight into his own as well as other people's natures. Mr. Stevenson was bitterly disappointed on that dreadful evening walk. He had helped to build a great and honoured business; he wished his son to continue in his solid, utilitarian profession. As a docile child Louis craved to be an engineer. When other children fixed on their future careers, little Lew vowed—

"But I, when I am stronger and can choose what I'm to do,
O Leerie, I'll go round at night and light the lamps with you."

He visited the harbours of Fife, when thirteen, with Mr. Stevenson. "My first professional tour, my first journey in the complete character of man without the help of petticoats," he proudly calls this visit to the golden fringe of the grey mantle of the kingdom of Fife. Louis enjoyed these excursions with his father hugely. Mr. Stevenson's heart's desire was to see his son established in what had become an hereditary vocation in his family. Then, suddenly, he found he had a changeling child, who would wrest no vantage ground from the ocean, nor toil till he built on some wild shore a protective harbour or a tower flashing with an abiding warning light. He was determined to pursue that will-o'-the-wisp, literature. From Vailima, in one of his last letters, Louis, recalling that sore fight with his father, and some of Mr. Stevenson's arguments in favour of his sure profession, says: "Were it not for my health, which made it impossible, I could not find it in my heart to forgive myself that I did not stick to an honest

common-place trade when I was young, which might have supported me during these ill years. But you men with salaries don't know how a family weighs on a fellow's mind."

Sage old Johnson says, "When a man is young he thinks himself of great importance. As he advances in life he learns to think himself of no consequence, and becomes more patient and better pleased."

Robert Louis Stevenson was wayward and impatient, full of "the gloom of youth," in the days which culminated in that "dreadful" walk. Suave of tongue, kind of heart, as a rule sensitively shrinking from wounding any one, he flouted and ran counter to his father on many subjects with the inhuman selfishness of youth. The reserved elder man was more pained than the fervid, agitating son. But they were closely bound together for all their antagonism. They had many a united talk, though it seemed to those who knew not their ways, a wordy war; but, like wise men before them, they, "*except in opinion*," were not disagreeing, having, as a modern writer says, "the same immense orthodoxy that lies beneath our differences."

Mrs. Stevenson was relieved, when her husband and son returned from that memorable evening confabulation, to find the storm which had been pending had broken and cleared the atmosphere. Mr. Stevenson held that none of Louis's juvenile efforts at writing, which his mother treasured, were of sufficient merit to justify his thinking of earning his bread by his pen. He hoped his readiness of speech might help him at the Bar. Sir Walter Scott averred his legal training had given him stability. He regarded literature as a crutch, not as a sole staff. Louis Stevenson liked the idea of following Scott, though he resolved literature would be his staff. It is curious that he, like Scott, learned much of seafaring among the misty isles of the North. Louis journeyed in the *Pharos*, the Northern Lighthouse steamer. Louis's grandfather and Sir Walter had viewed the scenes of *The Pirate* in a voyage in 1814 in the *Pharos* of that day. Mrs. Stevenson approved of the settlement of the vexed question. Many a literary man besides Scott had walked the boards of the Parliament House and been all the better man of letters for his legal training and standing. She, perhaps

alone, knew how bitter a disappointment it was to her husband to have his only son refuse to become heir to the business he had arduously and proudly enlarged. She, as usual, took a cheerful view of the future, pictured Louis a learned judge, as the mention of the pen as a staff irritated the engineer, and while she allayed her husband's heartburnings she encouraged the son to begin his legal studies seriously, so as to earn time eventually to proceed with his chosen profession, which his father persisted was no profession at all.

Like Fleeming Jenkin, he held (till in each case Louis proved to them they were wrong) "that literature was not a trade; that it was no craft; that the professed author was merely an amateur with a door-plate."

Louis recognised the fact that he had wounded his father on his tenderest point, that he had taken these wounds gallantly, and had advised wisely; so to make amends he promised to do more than look into his law classes when he happened to pass that way.

Before he was twenty-one Louis had weathered the heaviest equinoctial gale of his spring-time of

life ; and he now looked forward hopefully to the desert of the future, though his mother was the only one who believed, at that time, that he would turn that desert into an evergreen garden.

Learning to Write

"The morning drum-call on my eager ear
Thrills unforgotten yet; the morning dew
Lies yet undried along my field of noon."

—*Songs of Travel.*

CHAPTER VIII

Learning to Write

"NO one ever had such pains to learn a trade as I had, but I slogged at it day in day out, and I frankly believe (thanks to my dire industry) I have done more with smaller gifts than almost any man of letters in the world," he wrote in 1887. He began his apprenticeship to the art he adopted almost in babyhood, trying to put his thoughts into words when he had not very long gained the power of speech, and insisting on Cummy writing his gibberish. *The History of Moses* was his first comprehensible piece of composition; then that was followed by *Records of Noseingdale* and the *Sunbeam*, and by 1864 he had manuscripts in his Heriot Row den to consult over and show to his literary school friend. In these hobbledehoy days he wrote many ponderous

works. In his thirteenth year, while on a tour to Fife with his father, he was full of excitement at the prospect of a drive over Magus Moor and of passing the spot where Archbishop Sharpe was murdered. Among the partakers in that deed Louis confesses: "The figure that always fixed my attention is that of Hackston of Rathillet, sitting in the saddle with *his cloak about his mouth.* An incident, at once romantic and dramatic, which awakes the judgment and makes a picture for the eye. How little do we realize its perdurable power! Had he not thrown his cloak about his mouth, or had the witnesses forgot to chronicle the action, he would not have haunted the imagination of my boyhood. It is an old temptation with me to pluck away that cloak and see the face; to open that bosom and read the heart. With incomplete romances about Hackston the drawers of my youth were lumbered." In these years of preparation for a legal career his mind was set on literature. He determined to succeed in putting into fitting phrases the thoughts that welled up so freely. Great was his admiration of those who had succeeded. He says he played the "sedulous ape" to

Hazlitt, Lamb, Wordsworth, Sir Thomas Browne, Defoe, Hawthorne, and Montaigne. He called these trials at imitations "monkey tricks" and "ventriloquial efforts." "It was so Keats learned," he says, "and there never was a finer temperament in literature." Edinburgh being, as he notes, a town with the traffic congested into a few streets, residents ofttimes encounter their fellow-townsmen. In Princes Street, Louis constantly observed Dr. John Brown strolling along, spectacled, benign, keenly but kindly eyeing the passers-by. The Doctor, in Louis's eyes, was never alone, for behind him stalked his immortal dog "Rab." Louis heartily envied the man who had created that faithful follower, for he had never studied the trade of writing; but as Louis, speaking to him in his verses, notes:—

"Your e'e was gleg, your fingers dink;
Ye didna fash yoursel' to think,
But wove, as fast as puss can link,
Your denty wab;
Ye stapped your pen into the ink,
An' there was Rab!"

But Louis knew well that, as a rule, it took years of strife to make an author's

"Things o' clay spreid wings o' life."

Another example of one who seemed to enjoy a heaven-born intuition how to wield a pleasing pen, had also limped cheerfully along Princes Street. Of Scott, Louis says, "Of the pleasures of his art he tasted fully; but of its toils and vigils and distresses never man knew less. A great romantic—an idle child."

Freakish and fitful as Louis was, he realized from the first it was not chance that would help him into the foremost ranks. Some he knew would spend years seeking for the four-leaved clover, the coveted key to the gates of fortune, while others would plough and sow till they had a field of four-leaved clovers. These workers trusted not to luck, but to labour; for, as Mark Twain says, in one of his serious moments, "There is many a way to win in this world, but none of them is much worth without good hard work to back it."

In a "College Magazine," Louis describes how he, the seemingly consistent pattern idler in his dronish wanderings, was in reality always busy, for he was armed with two books—one to read

and one to write in. "It was not so much," he says, "that I wished to be an author (though I wished that too), as that I vowed that I would *learn to write.* That was a proficiency that tempted me, and I practised to acquire it, as men learn to whistle, in a wager with myself." He persevered till he said, "he had legions of words swarming to his call, dozens of turns of phrase simultaneously bidding for his choice, and he himself knowing what he wants to do and (within the narrow limit of a man's ability) able to do it."

In 1873 he made the acquaintance of Sidney Colvin, who became his adviser and critic in literature, and who introduced him to some influential editors. Louis's first paper was published in *The Portfolio.* The essay was entitled "Roads," and was signed L. S. Stoneven. His second, "Ordered South," written the same winter at Mentone, appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine.* This article, founded on fact, for his health sent him abroad, took him three months to write, for he was still an apprentice, and even when a master craftsman he would write and re-write with laborious patience. "Whole chapters

of *Otto*," he tells us, "were written as often as five or six times." Mrs. Fleeming Jenkin was living at Bournemouth when Louis was writing her husband's memoir. "I used," she says, "to go to his room in the afternoon after tea, and tell him all I could remember of certain times and circumstances. He would listen intently, every now and then checking me while he made a short note, or asking me to repeat or amplify what I had said, if it had not been quite clear. Next morning I went to him again, and he read aloud to me what he had written—my two hours of talk compressed into a page, and yet it seemed to me all there, all expressed. He would make me note what he had written, word by word, asking me, 'Does this express quite exactly what you mean?' Sometimes he offered me alternative words, 'Does this express it more truly?' If I objected to any sentence as not conveying my meaning, he would alter it again and again, unwearied in taking pains." *Will o' the Mill* was the first story he ventured to reprint. The scenery in it was in part a remembrance of the Brenner Pass, in the Tyrol, which

he had crossed when twelve. As a boy, he must have studied his surroundings, and with his artistic perceptions all awake, decided it would make a telling scenic effect when he would stage a romance to suit it. His father complained that Louis did not use the eyes God had given him, but was gazing at trivialities, while the engineer was observing the forceful action of the Tweed, and considering how best it could be yoked to work for human good. While Thomas Stevenson's sight had been trained to "pore over the engineer's voluminous handy book of nature," his son's brown eyes were noting vital trifles from a different line of vision and his observations were vivid and lasting. Like the true artist he was, he was ever busy taking sketches from nature, which he stowed away in his memory, and had the happy knack of finding again when he wished to work them into his bigger canvas. John Todd's tales of how he took his flocks across the border, by these inviting by-ways, the now deserted old drove loans, of the perils of the journey, Louis listened to in the Pentlands, and these reminis-

cences enabled him to put the audacious Anne St. Ives under a reliable escort when he left the shelter of Swanston.

When Louis Stevenson promised his father to qualify for the Bar, he knew he could find ample time conscientiously to pursue his legal studies; also devote many hours to his self-elected avocation —learning to write. He did not care for out-of-door relaxations. His pursuit of pleasure kept him house-bound, for reading and writing were his recreations. When cringing with cold, he gave it as his opinion, "Life does not appear to me to be an amusement adapted to this weather." He found it was less bleak when the haggard wintry day was done, and the lamps shone on the rainy streets more warmly than the weakly sun. Then, in the gloaming, when the castle and the hills were limned against the pale indigo sky, Robert Louis Stevenson took his walks abroad. If a flaw of sunshine came amid the prevailing bleakness of winter, he exulted in its rays, and went forth gay and lively, ready to frolic or bask in the sunlight. "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive,"

he said. The seemingly toilsome work to which he had apprenticed himself, cheered him light-heartedly on his way. "To have many aspirations is to be spiritually rich," he said, and believing that to be the case, he was the richest of millionaires.

Much time as he gave to his literary studies, he did not neglect his promise to his father. His legal coach, now a professor in the Edinburgh University, speaking of him lately, said he found him an alert, interested, but, at the same time, an erratic pupil. While expounding to Louis some point which he ought to impress on his memory, Louis's capricious attention had been rivetted by some minor detail,—maybe it was the history of the maker of the law,—and, before he would continue his dry-as-dust study, he would concentrate his energy on unearthing some biographical fact, or in clothing some legal quibble with a bright thread or two from the web of his fancy. His note-book was never out of his hand. "Wait, I'll jot that down in my own words," he would say, or "What was that you said I must not forget? I had better note it too."

His coach assured him he had a mastery of his subject, and Louis smiled delightedly. He then thought it would be as well to have two strings to his bow.

"I want to succeed at the Bar," he said earnestly. "Do you really think I am likely to?"

"We'll hear you yet before the First Division," his tutor was saying, when the excitable Louis sprang up, holding out his hands to stop him.

"Oh, don't," he cried, "don't please even speak of such a thing; I'd rather face death a thousand times than stand up before these heavy-wigged, red-robed solemnities. Euch! The veriest thought of such a thing makes me shiver to the marrow of my bones"; and he huddled himself into a pitiable, teeth-chattering object, shaking his hair over his face, and sank down, as if limp with horror, into a seat. Then rising, he strode nervously up and down the room, enlarging, with that voluble speech of his, on his shyness, which, he said, no one believed in. "I hate publicity; I dread publicity; I simply could not stand up and plead." This was a true statement, for his cousin says, "After passing the examination for the Scottish

Bar, he appeared in the Parliament House with his wig and gown, and here a tale is told of his first case. He had merely, at a particular time, to appear before the Judge, and intimate some preliminary step in a case; but when the time came, his heart seemed to recoil from the necessary phraseology, and he had to get a brother lawyer to say the short sentence necessary." In a private room Louis was the best of speakers, no matter what subject was being discussed; but even at the "Speculative," when called on to wag his usually almost too ready tongue, his delivery was poor, though he had no lack of words; the circling action of his hands, which were as part of his speech, had to be curtailed, for if indulged in on a platform the exaggerated flourishes moved the audience to laughter. Ridicule was to Louis a deadly weapon. He was fitted with no armour against its poignancy. Before it he stood unarmed and naked. His harmless, naive vanity was specially liable to hurts by ridicule. Never having associated much with other children, he had not early run the gauntlet of the cruelly candid speech, the in-

genious modes of teasing which they indulge in, and to which they become case-hardened. Louis, with an overbalance of sensitiveness, was always touchily thin-skinned. He could not bear publicity. A platform notoriety he shrank from in terror, though he liked to create a sensation in a roomful of friends. Although he had the type of face we often see in distinguished actors, and for all his poor physique had a grace of carriage, he would never have shone on the stage; for an unsympathetic audience, a cold reception, not to speak of a hiss, would have sent him flying to the wings in nervous despair.

He was fond of private theatricals. It was the one social amusement he was keen to participate in. He took particular delight in those arranged by Prof. Fleeming Jenkin, but he was well drilled into his *rôle*, and never had a very prominent part to play. He had attended Professor Jenkin's classes during the "vast pleasantry of his curriculum" at Edinburgh University. He could not in the professor of engineering's soul-chilling classroom solace himself with restless

inattention as was his wont, for the professor, "cocking his head like a terrier, with every mark of the most engaging vivacity and readiness," fixed an arresting eye on the youth. When he came to beg this professor for a certificate of attendance, he was refused. Louis had played the truant to excess in his engineering studies. Professor Blackie, when asked for a like certificate, had looked at this student, noted for the first time his unique look, and remarked that his face was not familiar to him. At this unintentional sarcasm Louis smiled, and the Greek professor, liking sunny looks, smiled back, as he amiably signed his name. Fleeming Jenkin was not to be so readily cajoled, and informed his erring pupil, who had lost many opportunities for orthodox study, "You are no fool, and you chose your course." But the conscientious professor and the truant pupil became firm allies when Louis had given in his decision at headquarters as to his resolution not to be an engineer. This friendship was fraught with much good for Louis. He was still among the "coiled perplexities of youth," and Fleeming Jenkin, from

his years and experience and sympathy, showed him how to straighten out some of the tangled skein.

They mutually appreciated an opponent who would fight a well-parried duel of argument. They had many tastes, many dislikes, in common. Both delighted in the heroics, in hearing of valiant deeds, of ennobling thoughts. Both found them stimulating. Both disliked golf, and golf, says Louis, "is a cardinal virtue in the City of the Winds." Nor did either of them become an archer of the Queen's Bodyguard, "which is the Chiltern Hundreds of the distasted golfer." Both were lovers of the stage. The play that Fleeming Jenkin put on the boards once a year gave to a certain coterie "a long and an exciting holiday in mirthful company."

Mrs. Stevenson was pleased that her son, who cared little for respectable company and for none of Edinburgh's social gatherings, but railed unceasingly at the buckram of a comfortable citizen's life, had found a West-End house to his taste, and she was glad of the warm friendship which sprang up between the professor and her boy.

The professor had a good influence over Robert Louis Stevenson when he was still supple and immature enough to bend and improve under a training hand. "I remember," records Louis, "taking his advice upon some point of conduct. 'Now,' said he, 'how do you suppose Christ would have advised you?' and when I had answered that He would not have counselled me anything unkind or cowardly—'No,' he said, with one of his shrewd strokes at the weakness of his hearer, 'nor anything amusing.'" This frankly acknowledged weakness led Louis into many flippant perversions; his "tricksy mocking" look bore fruit in words. Professor Jenkin reminded Louis when he was in a critical humour, picking holes in other people's work, that, in Professor Blackie's words, "All criticism worthy of the name is the ripe fruit of combined intellectual insight and long experience. Only an old soldier can tell how battles ought to be fought. There is no more sure sign of a shallow mind than the habit of seeing always the ludicrous side of things."

Stevenson, in these embryo days, before he had done any recognised work, was harder in

his judgments than when his opinion was of weight. His essay on Burns is a sample of his sneeringly severe criticisms. He expressed a wish when in Vailima that he could re-write his paper on Robert Young, for, as he says, "His profile was blurred in the boyish sketch. I should like well to draw him again with a maturer touch." He would have re-focussed Burns, too, for the tooth of time gnawed away the hardness of youth, and made him "more gently scan his brother man." Stevenson sketched Robert Burns in his untrained days, when he, who never had a sorrow in his life, could not enter into the tragedy of convivial Burns. Carlyle realized the tragedy, and drew him as only a finished artist can. When Louis had won his spurs, he looked on the work of his fellow-knights, of those still in the ranks, with the most lenient of eyes.

Louis Stevenson, though amenable to advice and snubbing, if administered judiciously by those he held not in awe but in respect, had very decided opinions of his own, which he aired and defended, not only among those of his age, but, and what was very prejudicial to him, in the

face of his elders. Hearing him fearlessly attack some reverend senior's pet foible, unsparing in his thrusts, many would think young Stevenson was contentious and uplifted, but when he came to his own merits he was the most modest and unbragging of youths. He seldom spoke unkindly of any one. If others did so in his presence, love of battle and justice made him at once the champion of those attacked. This desire to war in words whenever chance offered, to advocate theories, or contradict other folks, certainly made him unpopular among those who did not know him well. He remarked: "I was a very humble-minded youth, though it was a virtue I never had much credit for."

He was a lonely student. He had comparatively few acquaintances of his own age when he left school. Mr. Baildon describes how he was smuggled into Heriot Row, or met his friend in the gardens, when they were schoolmates. To "make believe" their scribbling tastes and talk were contraband was like Louis, and he preferred to smuggle his literary friend into his home, as such a proceeding had an air of mystery about

it which was attractive. However, when his law studies had begun, he took a less critical view of everybody and everything, and lithesomeness of spirits bubbled up in him. When free from the fear of routine on an office stool, he began to find that his contemporaries, grown out of the uninviting manners of their boyhood, were polished and accomplished men whose friendship was worth cultivating. The Speculative Society brought him into intimate acquaintance with its members. He speaks lovingly of it in some of his early papers, and in the introduction to *Kidnapped*. Archie Weir was a member of this august debating society—an ancient and conservative body. It had comfortable rooms within the University, and Louis liked the olden customs it held to; its objections, for instance, to such innovations as gas, and it adhered to its huge candelabrum of wax lights.

In the early seventies Louis was twice president of the "Speculative." He wrote several papers for this society: "The Influence of the Covenanting Persecution on the Scottish Mind" (1871); "Notes on Paradise Lost" (1872); "Notes

on the Nineteenth Century" and "Two Questions on the Relations between Christ's Teaching and Modern Christianity" (1873); "Law and Free Will—Notes on the Duke of Argyll." "Speculative evenings," he said, "form pretty salient milestones on our intellectual journey; looking back along mine, I see a good deal of distance got over—whether well or ill I am not here to judge." He tells how, after his introductory evening there, he made a speech in a state of "nervous exaltation that we have no language strong enough to describe. My electricity," he says, "seemed negative. I had no common interests with the others, no old stories to retell, any remark was a hazardous experiment; and I ended my night by walking home alone, in the blackness of despondency. How I should have laughed any one to scorn who had stopped me then on the Bridges and told me that I should spend in that Society some of the happiest hours of my life, and make friends from among those very members who were now so forbiddingly polite!" This quotation is from his Valedictory Address, given in March, 1872. In it he indulged in some speculation as

to great writers who might arise from among those present now, such as "The Spec." had cradled in former years, for famous men had been among its members. No one thought that the frail, boyish composer of that speech would ever be more than a dilettante in the profession of letters—an advocate with private means, no inclination to practise, and a leaning towards literature. "And who knows, gentlemen, with what Scotts or Jeffreys we may have been sharing this meeting-hall, about what great man we shall have curious anecdotes to tell over dining-tables, and write to their biographers in a fine, shaky octogenarian hand? We shall have many stories, too, of fellow-members who did *not* come to the surface in after life, but, it may be, went straightway to the bottom—many 'vivas to those who have failed and to those whose war vessels sank in the sea.' Yes, if we should have here some budding Scott, or if the new Shakespeare should here be incubating his fine parts, we shall all, gentlemen, have a hand in the finished article—some thoughts of ours, or at least some way of thinking, will have taken hold upon his mind,

some seasonable repartee, some happy word, will have fallen into the 'good soil' of his genius, and will afterwards bring forth an hundredfold. We shall all have had a hand, I repeat, at making that Shakespeare or that Scott."

While he figured constantly at the "Spec.," and was a sought-for guest at the members' dinners, 'L. S. Stoneven" had not written again, but papers were appearing in the *Cornhill* and elsewhere signed "R. L. S." In the Speculative Society Roll Book he signed himself Robert Louis Stevenson, and in a note states what his baptismal name really was. At that time he wrote to the "Spec." secretary a letter of four pages of comic pomposity, giving his reasons for diverging from his registered one of Lewis Balfour, and announcing his intention to make that of "Robert Louis" famous.

How well he succeeded is recorded in the *History of Our Own Times*. Mr. Justin Macarthy thus sums up his work: "Stevenson, judged impartially by his own works, was undoubtedly one of the greatest English writers during the latter part of the nineteenth century. He stole quietly into

the world of fame. He endeared himself to the whole of the reading public of English-speaking countries. His work was always essentially his own inspiration, and was carried out by his own mode of treatment. He created situations rather than characters, but when he set about drawing a character he drew with the firm and steady hand of a master. There was nothing oblique or vague about him. What he saw he saw, and what he saw he could describe. If that is not to be an artist, then we, at least, have no idea what an artist is."

Legal and Literary Training

"The powers and the ground of friendship are a mystery, but looking back I can discern in part we loved the thing he was, for some shadow of what he was to be."

—*Memories and Portraits.*

CHAPTER IX

Legal and Literary Training

RAPIDLY, in these years of legal study, he was obtaining more and more the command of fluent expression in language, for he says, "As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version book would be in my hand, to note down the features of the scene, or commemorate some halting stanzas. Thus I lived with words." The result of this close communion with words is to be found in the various papers he contributed to *Cornhill*, papers which have since become famous in collected form as *Virginibus Puerisque*. They were, he said, like "milestones on the wayside of my life." To those who knew him in these past days to re-

read them is to travel again the same road in the same good company. It was early in the seventies that we first knew Robert Louis Stevenson, for though we had been nearly opposite neighbours all our lives, watching the same Leerie light the lamps, he never chanced to play in the division of gardens which we patronized, nor did he live much in Heriot Row in spring or summer, when the green grounds became the meeting place of neighbouring children. His square of gardens had for a centre-piece a pond, our envy. In the middle of this circular scrap of water is a very limited and rocky islet. When we told Louis how we had coveted that pond he sympathised. He said he had longed to invade that mimic eyot, and he had to wait till frost paved a way. He in turn envied our pleasaunce when we recounted to him the joys we had had from the making of "posies." They were not bouquets of flowers, as their name might lead one unversed to suppose, but holes dug in the grass and cunningly covered over with turf, so that it needed a trained eye to discover the site of the pit. In these posies,

which were usually made at some hour when the gardens were empty, were put "peeries," marbles, or our favourite tin soldiers. The owners rose betimes to see if their hidden treasure was still secure. Once, some good fairy put sixpence into a posie, and much astonished was the recipient. Louis would have committed all his worldly wealth to the earth if he had dug one. There was a secretiveness and a pleasurable anxiety about posies which our vivacious friend gauged, though he did not hear of them until he was out of his teens.

When Louis was a sleepless boy, Cummy used to pull aside the blind and show him Queen Street, on a higher terrace opposite, across what he called "the great gulf of darkness," made by the Heriot Row gardens. Its street lamps shone reassuringly, and Louis, wondering if there were any other children denied the gift of sleep, noted there was one house opposite where a light burned every night.

He felt a consoling companionship in that gleam which came from our old home, 52, Queen Street. My father burned the midnight oil in

his room high up in that once busy house, for night was the only opportunity he had, in the toilful twenty-four hours, to read and study. Ten years before the time when Louis tossed restless with fever, hearing all night "the wind intone" in that house, early one morning, after much search, my father found the blessed anæsthetic qualities of chloroform, and was lulled by this syrup of sleep into controllable unconsciousness for the first time. In 1870 our old home at Queen Street was broken up by the death of our parents, and we moved to a smaller house not very far distant. Mutual law studies and the Speculative brought Louis and my brother together. "The Republic," R. L. S. called our new abode, where the members were of an independent equality, which seemed to Louis a preferable arrangement to the shackles of monarchical ties, for at that period he owns, "the unrejoicing faces of his elders filled him with contemptuous surprise." He would air his convictions with uncurbed freedom in the republic, where there was no one oppressed and sage with the weight of years to damp his ardour by telling

him he babbled nonsense. As he himself said, he heard his voice echo years after "in the empty vestibule of youth." He would frequently drop into dinner with us, and of an evening he had the run of the smoking-room. After ten p.m., when a stern old servant, who held by monarchical discipline, and kept a watchful guard over the republic, went to rest, the "open sesame" to our door was a rattle on the letter box. Louis's fancy for the mysterious was whetted by this admittance by secret sign, and we liked his special rat-a-tat, for it was the forerunner of an hour or two of talk which he described as "the harmonious speech of two or more," by far the most accessible of pleasures, and the society talk of even the most brilliant man is of greatly less account than what you will get from him (as the French say) in a "little committee." His studies, his notions, his hopes, he described with a nimble tongue which he accentuated by his flourishing actions, the "speaking gestures" of his thin, nervously formed hands. He often marvelled that these hands were not taken into consideration when he was an amateur emigrant, and was

mistaken for everything under the sun except an educated gentleman. He says, his fellow-passengers, who classed him as a working-man seeking occupation and health in a new world, did not observe his hands, for the only tool they could hold was the pen. Then he was "always supposing." As a "callant" at college, one of his fellow-students says, as they walked out into the muddy-streeted, cold town, he varied the monotony of the way down to Princes Street by "supposings." "If you were walking along the street with him," wrote this companion, "and the most trivial thing struck his eye, he would start supposing; in fact, there was no end to his supposing, and I suppose that is how he got to the top of the tree in fiction."

Others who came into the "little committee" by our library hearth might be tired, depressed, and sit still, enjoying a consoling pipe. Louis never was glum. He might be in the depth of dejection, but it was such magnified drooping of body and soul as to be farcical. Then, when laughter greeted him, the grotesque sombreness dispersed like a cloud before sunshine, and he

threw off his cut-throat-looking Spanish cloak, stood erect with a smile hovering about his long eyes, as well as on his tricksy mouth. Quiet he never remained. He could not resist putting in a word. Still, for all his love of talking, he was also a good listener, never showing boredom, and anxious to grasp the meaning of other speakers, assisting with tactful and sympathetic interest from out of his own overflowing vocabulary. He was always ready to add to his list of words, or glean insight from his friends' notions. If others were silent, he had a perfect cataract of thoughts, of supposings, to pour out, and he seized the opportunity to clothe them in words befitting his fastidious taste. Full of perpetual motion, and for ever walking up and down as he spoke, or adding action to his words, never sitting placidly still, his constant unrest was not distracting or annoying. He flitted about with a womanly cunning, never stumbled over a stool, upbraided an unoffending sofa for being in the road, or committed the heinous crime of treading on the dogs. He might pace up and down, jump up as if electrified to expound some fresh frolicsome

fancy, but our mastiff and other dogs remained unconcerned, for they had learned that he would gingerly pick his steps among their paws, and there was no necessity to move from the warmest vantage ground on the rug, or prepare to lay hold of a disturbing element in the shape of a leg, a defence against aggressive feet which was permitted to our veteran terrier by reason of his toothlessness.

Louis's outlandishness of dress, his mannerisms, his frenchified flourishing of his hands, and his transparent modes of attracting attention, used to come in for derisive condemnation. We observed that he employed particular Stevensonian stratagems in order never to remain long in the background. If the ceaseless ability he displayed in wagging that easily set-agoing tongue of his did not make any impression on his hearers, if his prominent position in front of fire with his cigarette, more waved in semi-circles as he chattered than legitimately smoked, drew on him no special notice or remark, or purposely to bait him, his most pronounced eccentricities passed unheeded, he cast his fertile mind about to devise

means to bring himself to the fore. One rare occasion, when he had on a dress coat, and came in to us on his way home, he gravely asked leave to take off his swallow-tail and sit in his shirt-sleeves. This was really more a ruse to bring himself before the "little committee" than to ease himself of the garment which he vowed oppressed him, for when leave was granted, no astonishment expressed, and his coat folded with laudable carefulness and relegated to a back seat, a shadow of such evident chagrin flitted over his face that it was all that the plotters could do to refrain from laughing, and so encourage their victim. For all these whimsical mannerisms he had to endure a deal of taunting. He protested against the injustice of our accusations, but he never took offence at them, though he defended himself in a manner which should have done him honour if he had pled as well before his dreaded Lords of Session. It did not become a youth of his years, we held, to dress in such a mountebankish style.

Professor Blackie, for instance, because of his silver locks and his recognised and honoured

position, could, without mockery, wear a plaid over a frock-coat, and march along Princes Street beating time with his famed kail runt staff to the Songs of the North he crooned as he went. Strangers turned and gazed at the picturesque professor, and that was perhaps what he wanted. But we explained to Stevenson that it was forward audaciousness on his part to affect lank locks, slouch hat, and garments so incongruous and shabby as to be remarkable. "He always wore his hair long, and frequently looked anything but groomed, but one mental picture is indelibly printed in my mind: a flannel shirt, not over clean, a black and white straw hat that was well ventilated and had seen much service, no waistcoat, but round his middle a red and black scarf with two ends hanging down behind and showing just below the skirt of his jacket, the scarf functioning both as a 'cummerband' and also in lieu of suspenders," a contemporary and friend wrote of him at Hyères. His clothes in his Edinburgh days were not much, if any, better. His flannel shirts attracted the smuts of wintry weather. In vain his companions showed how

starched linen withstood the assaults of grime. In Edinburgh he could not rid himself of a waistcoat, but an overcoat, such as his friends sheltered themselves beneath in winter, was, we said, what he ought to wear. The cloak he preferred, to the handier garment suggested, was not suited for him of all people, delicate chested as he was. Such a cloak, too, in a wind-swept city like Auld Reekie was dangerously draughty.

Nothing annoyed him more than our statement that his curious taste in dress, which made him appear a starveling play actor, was an eccentricity he cultivated to draw attention to his genius. When his uncut hair hung below his newly donned advocate's wig, he heard a hearty laugh as he, for the first time, "added to the interminable patter of legal feet" in the Parliament House. It excited his curiosity. He asked the reason. It was explained to him that an inquiring legal senior had asked, as Robert Louis Stevenson passed, who was "the marvellous boy, the new Chatterton"? That name, received from the ready legal jester, was nearly the means of persuading him to go and have his hair fashionably shorn.

Teasing jibes, which he received in a bountiful supply, were, he was told, for his ultimate good. If he had been brought up with a band of brothers, these small conceits would have been nipped in the bud in the nursery. He was told he should be grateful for home truths, but after a severe shower of chaff he would sadly throw away his cigarette, wind himself in his cloak, and go off with an elaborate bow and with a tragic droop of his sombrely shrouded form. To his credit be it said, he bore no ill-will. Next evening he would return exultant over some new suggestion he had to make.

It was always a source of wonderment, and no inquisitorial cross-questioning could extract the information, why Louis's clothes were never seen with the gloss of newness on them. They were always worn where his angular joints were traceable through the cloth. He scorned to reply when asked at what pawnshop he acquired them in this second-hand condition. His excessive attenuation gave the idea that he had a scarcity of under-garments on below his rubbed velveteen and the poverty-stricken trousers. He looked

like a skeleton draped in a sheet. One winter he wore flannel shirts and turned-down collars to match, so funereal in colour that he was usually credited with committing the crime of walking in Princes Street with black shirts. He vowed they were blue, but the blue was of a coal-like shade. When he first appeared in our library wearing one of them, he was flattered with the commotion it created. It certainly added to his vagabondish appearance. He expounded its merits for a crusoeing expedition. For instance, it would never look soiled, he said, forgetful that it never looked clean. The suggestion that he should visibly number, or have various different designs embroidered on them, so as to let anxious friends know when he assumed a fresh one, damped his delight in them. A skull and cross-bones was thought of as a fitting emblem for one piratical shirt. He had been radiant over this new freak in his wardrobe, but he was so railed at that he left in high dudgeon, buttoning his docked velveteen jacket over the offending garment. Twice he was seen in conventional, brand-new suits. He looked well in them, for the tailors

artfully banished for once his poorly fed, poorly clad appearance. He always had a starving-of-cold look, for with his contracted chest and huddled-up shoulders he seemed to gather himself together for warmth. Mrs. Stevenson approved of her son's Samoan photographs. He turned over a new leaf in smartness as to dress in Vailima, for he writes: "I am now very dandy; I announced two years ago that I should change. Slovenly youth all right—not slovenly age. So really now I'm pretty spruce; always a white shirt, white necktie, fresh shave, silk socks; oh! a great sight." In his loose flannels, and standing erect before the camera, he looked more vigorous and broader than his wont. Mr. Payn, in the introduction to Miss Fraser's *In Stevenson's Samoa*, speaking of a group at Vailima, says, "In the frontispiece I recognise at once the *commanding* figure of my old friend standing by his horse." In my recollection Louis was never commanding. To use a Scotch word, for which there is no English equivalent, he had a "shilpit" look, which is starveling, crined, ill-thriven, all in one and more.

Both his father and mother had a fine, commanding presence: Mr. Stevenson square and massive, Mrs. Stevenson upright and elegant; but Louis had a timid, almost apologetic air. So much so that when he used to come in with his head bent forward, glancing alertly from side to side, and treading with a stealthy carefulness, one of our family dubbed him the "guinea fowl." On other occasions he would enter, flinging the door wide open, stepping springingly, his hands uplifted, as if he were the forerunner of some triumphant procession. Notwithstanding his spidery figure, his badly knitted, weedy frame, he moved with a quiet quickness, and stood with such a lithe ease of pose that he struck one as graceful.

He suffered for his grotesque taste in dress when abroad. He was for ever being arrested. "For the life of me I cannot understand it," he exclaims, after enumerating some woes, how travelling without a passport he was "cast, without any figure about the matter, into noisome dungeons"; how, even with a passport, no official would believe him to be a Briton. Mistaken for

a pedlar, he was refused admittance at inns. As a spy he was stopped at frontiers, and there is no absurd and disreputable means of livelihood but has been attributed to him in some heat of official or popular distrust.

When going *Across the Plains*, two men on the cars had a bet as to whether he was an out-of-work musician or no; and one, to put his suggestion to the test, offered him a place in the orchestra of a local theatre. This manager lost five dollars by his wrong guess, and Louis says, "*liquated* the debt at the bar." He owns in the Epilogue of the *Inland Voyage*, when the travellers set out on a fresh tour on foot, that he was unwisely dressed. He had an Indian embroidered smoking cap on his head, its golden lace and tassels frayed and tarnished. He wore a piratical shirt, already spoken of, which he says was "of an agreeable dark hue which the satirical called black, a light tweed coat made by a good English tailor, and a pair of ready-made linen trousers and leathern gaiters."

This was about 1876, and spies and the war were fresh in the official mind. The poor con-

tents of the prisoner's pockets, his excitable manner, his fluency in French, more than ever assured the gendarme that he was right to arrest the strange wayfarer. His companion's more steady pace not suiting Louis's longer strides, they each walked alone. Cigarette came along with a sturdy step, bearing the certificate of his nationality in his face and address. The officials recognised him at a glance as a British subject. The Commissionary, who had ordered the arrest of the suspected spy's companion, was flabbergasted at the new prisoner's appearance: his purse well filled, his passport correct, and dapperly dressed from head to heel, *en suite*, in grey clothes of an unmistakable Anglo-Saxon cut. They had to forego further travels and return to Paris forthwith, for the officials decided it was well to rid themselves of the mystery and sent them to headquarters. Even this, and several other adventures of the same species, failed to persuade Louis that his taste in clothes was striking. Many think he was careless in regard to dress. That was not so. He gave much thought and time towards

the getting together of his ill-assorted wardrobe. His friend at Hyères, already quoted, says, "If he was careless in dressing himself, he was keenly appreciative of excellence in others." Samoa, for the liberty and range in fantastic dressing its customs allowed him, must for that reason alone have suited him. To have, in lieu of swallow-tail coats, wreaths of flowers to wear on ceremonious occasions, was to him, indeed, an "engaging barbarism." He stuck to the last to his ideas of ease and taste in dress, for he died in his sailor's jumper.

The two occasions on which he wore new, well-made suits dwelt in the memory of his contemporaries. He had promised to officiate as groomsman at a friend's marriage. He allowed himself to be led to the tailor's and have his clothes ordered for him. Their rigidity terrified him. He begged for a velvet collar and cuffs to a frock coat, a gayer waistcoat; but his tailor, backed by his two boon companions who had escorted him to prevent escape, remonstrated: "On this occasion, Mr. Stevenson, you must allow me to use my judgment; you can order what

vagaries you choose when you have only yourself to please." This rebuke from the man of scissors quelled him. He dressed for this feast at our house, as his people were at Swanston, and the bridegroom feared, unless under surveillance to the last, he might appear in his usual docked velveteen jacket. But he was childishly interested in these novel clothes. He felt so strange in orthodox attire that we had difficulty in persuading him we were not chaffing when we did not laugh, when he, holding himself erect, strutted in. Just as we thought he was safely started for his post of duty, he rushed back and stood on a chair to see himself once more in a sideboard mirror, and, with a smile of incredulity, he sallied forth, apprehensive of hearing jeers from an astonished populace. He came in one Sunday evening, saying he had gone to church with his parents in these wedding garments. He was honestly chagrined that they had commended his appearance, and he kept marvelling that what to him was a singular garb had drawn no wondering notice down on his tall-hatted head.

The other suit of feasible clothes he was cajoled

into ordering cost him a *mauvais quart d'heure.* They were singularly light-coloured tweeds, and he wore them one day that he joined us in London. He made frequent calls on us to admire him, and we flattered and praised their make, for in them and that wedding garment (which he was never seen to wear again since his church-going in them was not considered a joke) he looked slight and graceful. The padding hid his high shoulders, and good cutting hid his spareness. Walking up the pathway by Holland House, some smuts fell, and Stevenson scudded like a ghost in his light robes along the alley till, breathless, he stopped, and gaspingly asked, "Have any blacks fallen on my angel clothes?" The question suggested a means to chastise him for overweening pride. We pretended to remove the offending body from the angelic coat—abused the clumsiness of an assisting brother for smudging the biggest smut on the victim's shoulder. Louis walked on, sadly ill at ease. We were possessed by demons of mischief: we rubbed in that imaginary smudge by condoling and suggesting remedies, while Louis tried to see the extent

of the blemish in plate-glass windows. We were cruel. His pained, nearly weeping, expression only urged us on to further flights of fancy, till he tore off his angel coat in High Street, Kensington. Seeing it still whitely immaculate, the weight of anxiety passed off his face. Then he cast a reproachful glance at us, and, with a forgiving smile, said, "Eh—you *two brutes*—to misquote a well-known author." After deliberating whether the spring sunshine were warm enough to allow him to continue the walk in his shirt-sleeves, he very leisurely resumed his coat, and the crowd which was gathering dispersed. That "angel" jacket (so called from its extreme lightness in colour) was the one he was arrested in the same autumn at Châtillon-sur-Loire, but by that season it had lost its delicate freshness and was grimy with travel-stains; so, worn along with the shirt of an "agreeable dark hue," turned rusty in the tub, the coat could no longer be classed as a heavenly garment.

Louis kicked somewhat too vehemently against the pricks when he was in the heart of the twenties. He had a hankering for the sunshine

and the South, and to be free of the inanities of custom; but, after all, he acknowledges the "old land is still the true love," and roving fancies are but "pleasant infidelities." The impetuous, wayward youth had really his lines allotted to him in very comfortable places. His home was certainly in a climate he disliked, but he had to own his native town was fair to look upon. He could, within ten minutes' walk of the west end of Princes Street, hear the peewits crying along the furrows, in fields bordering the Queensferry Road, and even "in the thickest of our streets, the country hill-tops find out a young man's eyes, and set his heart beating for travel and pure air." He had means to idle, and leisure in spring and autumn vacations to travel where he willed. During April, August, and September neither law court sits, and college gates are closed, so he was free to roam. So, though many think he was uncongenially situated in his home, the uncongenialness was more the perverse fretting of youth against the necessary harness of discipline than the actual reality.

He encouraged himself to eschew such amusements as came in his legitimate way. Balls he refused to attend, because he had to abandon his usual clothes and go in regulation dress suit, which, he boasted, stank in his nostrils. Not even fancy balls, which would have given him full scope for fantastic dressing, tempted him. He took the greatest interest in his companions' costumes, for he was quick to notice appropriate clothing on others. Before one fancy ball, an Edinburgh daily paper supplied ticket-givers with schedules for their guests to fill in with descriptions of their characters. Louis spent a happy afternoon with us "supposing" many staid, religious citizens were going as very remarkable characters. With dress to suit their parts the tempting schedules were supplied. One man of aldermanic proportions we dressed "As Chieftain of the Puddin' Race" in haggis tartan. It was a wet afternoon, and we all assisted to robe many unsuspected ball-goers. No one enjoyed acting as Master of the Robes more heartily than Robert Louis Stevenson. The President of our Republic, feeling a sudden weight of responsibility, sadly owned later that he had

thought it wiser to call on the Editor and remove these carefully concocted descriptions, for the uninvited guests might not see the jest in a proper light. They were all in type when they were brought back and ruefully committed to the flames.

Acrostics that winter, appearing in the *World*, engrossed our time. There was an E—U to be guessed. One who had been busy at the fancy ball schedules promptly said, "I know. Elihu the son of Tisphat." Louis was charmed at this ready invention, and walked up and down congratulating the coiner of names. "After my Maker, Elihu the son of Tisphat has always commanded my reverence," he declared. The inventor of Elihu was one of three sisters all noted for talking. We often wondered "If Louis and the G——'s met, who would speak most?" They did meet, and the three ladies, as usual, all spoke volubly and at once, and the room was a babble of laughter and voices. Louis's was dumb, for he could not be heard. When they left the dining-room, up he sprang, radiant with a new "supposing." "Suppose I was a Turk," he said, "and married to all

three Miss G——'s at once, would I turn deaf or dumb?"

His attendance at conventional entertainments was as rare as his suit of properly cut clothes, occasions to be remembered. For the ordinary dinner-party he had no stomach — Babylonish feasts he called them. Sometimes when he came into his "little committee" other members of it might have returned from what he characterized as Noah's Ark dinner-parties. He always inquired what other beasts they had gone in to feed with, two and two, and what talking entertainment the animal they had been paired with had treated them to. The flowers and dresses sported on such occasions also interested him. "The table was all blobs of purple and yellow things," said one, lighting his pipe and glad to be in his smoking-jacket again. "You mean violets and primroses?" suggested another. "Spring," said Louis, jumping up. He spoke for long of the joys of the opening year, for the mention of the woodland firstlings was as a breath of the country to him. If our friend did not like stiff banquets, he did not debar himself from unconventional ones. On my birth-

day in December, having with some friends been bitten with a mania for the culinary art, we decided to cook the natal feast ourselves to show our lately acquired prowess. Robert Louis Stevenson promptly accepted his invitation to this dinner, and helped at making a code of rules. We decided, if we cooked, the men must wait. Whether those who were to be butlers were to appear in evening clothes or not was long discussed, and finally decided in the affirmative. We cooks were to dine in our aprons. (We took the precaution to have a fresh supply for dining-room use.) The cook and housemaid had a holiday, and some ten of us took possession of a clean kitchen. Our old servant Jarvis retired to the seclusion of his pantry. He had been lenient, but somewhat contemptuous of this "ploy," and as curious as ourselves as to the result of our endeavours. He would only vouchsafe a well-known adage in regard to the number of cooks and the broth. Unless some untoward accident befel it, my mind was at rest about the said broth, for its nature had necessitated the previous preparation of its stock. My comrades were coached as

to its ingredients; so, if any guest cast doubts on it being of our own making, we would glibly dumbfound them with our knowledge of what was "intil't." We decorated the dinner table so as to prevent, in case of accidents, absolute starvation. We had loaves on the sideboard, and a couple of round Dutch cheeses on the table among the desert. The cheeses, with their ruddiness, lent themselves to decoration, and a 'prentice hand at sculpture fashioned them into a semblance of a bucolic face. We covered their bald scalps with bristling celery, and softened the prominent hardness of their brows by fringes of cress. The cook returned in time to dish our dinner, and Jarvis meanly ushered her in, to see her start of horror when she beheld a rockery of pans piled below the table, and a slide of grease over her white floor. He grimly enjoyed her surprise; I did not, for I knew I had to face her next morning, without the protection of guests. When she came in we were all busily engaged in picking up the potatoes; the pot they were in, being too heavy for novices' arms, had upset, and half its contents were flying over the slippery floor, half were

seeking death by drowning in a much-choked sink. We captured the runaways and applied resuscitating measures to the drowned. The dinner was a success; the food varied, but the spirits and the good-will of the guests kept high and steady. No one entered more fully into the fun of the feast than Louis Stevenson. As it was a species of fancy dress affair, he came in "waiter's" clothes, but softened their stiffness by a newspaper cap and a white apron. He received the dishes at the door, and introduced the viands with a preface, at which he was as ready with his tongue as with his pen. We cooks promptly complained of the waiting, which was wrong-sided and spasmodic. Louis conveyed an entrée in a grand march round the room with much high-stepping; but he was so engaged in talking that he was as awkward as his clumsy brother waiters at serving it.

Sometimes, when he took pot luck with us, and seasoned our dinner with good company, he would be so busy holding forth on some new theory that a dish would wait at his elbow for a length of time Jarvis thought inadvisable. The old man

would give it what he called a *shuggle* to attract attention, and that failing, break out with "Hoot, sir, gang on wi your dinner or let ithers gang." Louis tried this "shuggle." Jarvis had always the cloth in his mind, but the new waiter had not. A point of the feast was reached when a new supply of forks was needed. To Jarvis, to "scart his siller" was a crime of deepest dye. Our faithful tyrant's forbearance broke down when he caught sight of "yon laddie Stevenson" dealing forks (mixed with knives) like cards: "I'll wait on the twenty o' ye, but gi'e me my siller; I canna hae it dadded," he cried. Stevenson, who flattered himself he was assuming the *rôle* of waiter to perfection, whisking about with a napkin under his arm, was loth to retire. He begged to be allowed to serve an apprenticeship as footman under Jarvis; but he would have "no such daft-like" assistant. He commanded Louis, who was one of his favourites, to resume his seat and behave "weise-like." Then he meanly said that if Mr. Stevenson had not been mixing the knives and silver together, he would have noticed that none of the ladies had taken potatoes, and added:

"I ken why." Louis abandoned his warfare—his hopes of a butlership, and fell into his seat. He said he wished to know the worst at once, and begged Jarvis, as a staunch friend and the only grey-headed one among us, to tell him the truth, and the story of the "couping" of the potatoes was revealed. Louis sat sad and silent for a brief space, and vowed he would turn cannibal and eat a human-headed cheese, but recovered when the happy thought occurred to him to make the cooks taste first, and he supposed himself to be an Emperor who only by caution could avoid a poisoned dish. The crackers, which were among a somewhat unusual dessert, were as great a joy to Louis as they would have been if he had gone back a decade or two in his life. The varied caps in which the company dressed themselves pleased him as much as if he were again a flushed and fluttered child in blouse and socks. Crowns were too large, mitres nearer his size, but he hankered after the jester's cap. A pair of match-holders, with frogs climbing up their sides, have lived twenty years and more on my mantelpiece. Louis brought them up to the drawing-room that

evening, bearing one aloft in each hand, to lay them literally at my feet with an Eastern obeisance. We finished our party off with a dance. Louis seldom danced in an Edinburgh drawing-room after he got into swallow-tails, but the motley assemblage of cooks and waiters in many-coloured head-gear, suited his particular taste, and he footed it merrily at that irregular gathering, which left behind it laughter-moving memories for many long years.

Life at Twenty-five

"To know what you prefer, instead of humbly saying Amen to what the world tells you you ought to prefer, is to have kept your soul alive."

—*The Inland Voyage.*

CHAPTER X

Life at Twenty-five

THOUGH we chaffed him sorely on his "eccentricities of genius," we never found fault with his enthusiasm, an enthusiasm so infectious and refreshing. He was always brimful of new impressions, a rabid Radical keen on sweeping changes, or anxious to untie another knot he had found in his labyrinth of religious confusions. He changed in a trice from grave to gay with a dexterous swiftness which was free of restlessness or flightiness. He never let himself or his listeners be bored or tired by concentrating attention too long on one subject. As a talker by the winter fireside in these days, we gave him the crown for being the king of speakers. Before he had learned the art of writing he had acquired the power of speech, and a way of expressing him-

self which charmed his hearers. He believed that his tongue had been given him to say pleasant things to his fellow-beings. His "spice of wit" was Irish in its promptness and pleasantness. He had none of the exaggeration of American humour, and he winced under the slow felling, humiliating style that Scotch humour excels in. "I love fighting," he said, "but bitterly dislike people to be angry with me—the uncomfortable effect of fighting. I am made up of contradictory elements, and have a clearing-house inside of me where I dishonour cheques of bitterness." When he fought with that weapon, his tongue, he fought a fair fight from pure love of battle, never harbouring ill-will, though feeling wounds more acutely than most from his super-sensitiveness. His politeness to people he was not in accord with brought him up before the Bar of the "Little Committee" on the charge of being a humbug. He never acquired the brusque, honest rudeness of the true-born Scot, either in manner or appearance. Dull people were the only human beings he belaboured with scorn. Considering that then he was in the full bloom of the critical

self-satisfaction of youth, this showed his just mind and kindliness of heart. Bad-tempered or vicious people he could respect; but folk with torpid minds he fell foul of, and after loading them with comical sarcasms, reproach, and commiseration, he would next begin to wonder how it would feel to be inside their dense minds. He was, with that inquisitiveness of his, always longing to wear other people's shoes, to see where they pinched—king's shoes or beggar's "bauchles" he would have tried—and his imaginings of comforts to be derived from, or pains suffered in, the wearing of them, he would give us as he stood on the hearth smoking endless cigarettes.

He was tireless in his search for new sensations and new experiences. No one ever had such an insatiable curiosity. He did not take Thoreau's advice: "Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to many influences, to be played on; it is all dissipation." He revelled in being so played upon—a new tune every day he would have liked. Rathillet's cloak about his mouth excited his boyish interest in

that first visit of his to Fife, where he found that "history broods over that part of the kingdom like the easterly haar." The Princes Street Gardens attracted him, not only for seclusion, but because there he always hoped to find on the green slope a subterranean passage which in olden days had led from the houses on the Castle Hill to the Nor' Loch.

In his very early days Louis told us he had longed for a brother, so that he might call him Raca, and see what would happen. We assured him if he had come over to our nursery he would have experienced prompt punishment from the powers on high; for, on the use of any unparliamentary language, our nurse, a disciplinarian, would have applied a spoonful of mustard to the erring tongue. Louis asserted that though this treatment had given us a horror of "Colman," it did not seem to have eradicated opprobrious epithets from our vocabulary. In fact, he consulted Jarvis as to our upbringing, for he was puzzled to find that we younger members of a long family had eluded the Shorter Catechism, and only knew a few psalms and paraphrases in

metre. He persisted that he once heard us wrangling as to whether there were eleven or twelve commandments. We pretended to be offended by this statement, and he was profuse in his apologies, but he refused to be convinced, and baptized us the Scottish Heathen.

He told us he had been taught from his infancy, along with the Shorter Catechism, that the devil, for obvious reasons, always favoured the first ventures of a gambler. He, with a firm belief in this, and anxious to cheat Satan, when ordered South, put five pounds on the gaming table, hugging himself with the knowledge that this was to be his last as well as his first venture. He was full of visions how he would spend the gold thus won from the devil, so he put his money down with smiling confidence—and lost. He was utterly flabbergasted. He felt, he said, as if a prop of his belief had been shattered, but he added that Satan made a mistake if he thought he would ever get him to try his luck again.

When his ventures and theories failed, naturally he was crestfallen, but with his determination to be cheerful, and his elastic nature, he brightened

up, and sought for some other ground to explore. His conversation wandered through many curious by-paths, and was overflowing with strangely odd conjectures. At one time he was bent on founding a pawning society. Every one was to pawn under the title of Arthur Libble the world over. Some future investigator of musty records was to be astounded that Arthur Libble had been constantly raising money on all manner of things in every quarter of the globe. Lives of Arthur Libble were to be written in coming centuries, and many conjectures made as to the manner of man he was. Louis relished, as he said, "to play with possibility, and knock a peg for fancy to hang on," and he saw and planned many possibilities as to Arthur Libble. We said we did not want to pawn anything; and Louis, who had come in elated, was very depressed because we would not join in this new-fangled fad of his.

Another evening he fell to conjecturing, if he were suddenly transplanted back to the fourteenth or fifteenth century, what vocation in life would have suited him. His companions said they would have gone, heavily sheathed in armour, as

knights or their followers, careering about on cart horses. Though Louis, too, would fain have been one of them, he knew his want of physical strength would have debarred him from that rough-and-ready life. He thought a jester would have suited his capabilities—Wamba, Touchstone, Yorick, and many friends in motley sprang up to bear him company. His face shone, and he perambulated up and down the library picturing himself "a fool i' the forest." A man-at-arms shattered his dreams, and brought him to a standstill on the rug. He held Louis had not brains enough for a jester, but our gay R. L. S. defended his aptitude for the post gallantly. Finally, however, he had to abandon this bright-robed career. The man-at-arms showed our slim friend that although he could certainly talk so as to amuse two or three gathered round a nineteenth century library fire, he had no voice to sing to the ladies in the bower, no diplomatic tact wherewith to humour his lord, and would have given way to the temptation to harangue guests gathered round the baronial board on some private hobby of his own. He most unwillingly

relinquished cap and bells, and tried, without success, many employments. "I believe I would have to have been a turnspit," he cried in despair, but another vowed he was unfit even for that, for he would have scattered gravy as he scattered cigar ash, as he could no more keep his hands from their dumb pantomime than his tongue from its flow of words. Finally, and humbly, he took refuge in the Church, but as he could not even angle for Friday's dinner, he fixed that his Middle Ages vocation would have been clerk to the buttery and cellar.

After long marvelling at my brother's fondness for birds, and the pleasure he obtained from his small aviary which adjoined the library, Louis thought he, too, would like to taste of the joys of bird-keeping. He dashed in one forenoon to say he had started a cageful of avadavats. For a few days he came regularly to sing their praises. Then he arrived with them, and begged that they might be taken from him, for they had got on his nerves. His bulletins of satisfaction at their presence were all sanguine make-believes. The scraping of their bills, their perpetual feeble chirp,

irritated him, and the sight of the line of them crushed up together for warmth, made him, too, feel chilly.

Louis wanted to see if he could satisfy the appetite for sugar of a greedy pug we had. The dog had still a capacity for more lumps when the bag of sugar was empty, so Louis said he thought he could not afford to investigate that matter further. Some views on dessert plates instigated him to read Dumas to find out what they portrayed. He was one of those curious passengers Thoreau speaks of, who looked over the tafferel of his craft during the voyage over the sea of life, and did not journey like a stupid sailor picking oakum. He saw many wonders that other passengers were blind to. In great, as well as in trivial things, Louis Stevenson was full of absorbing curiosity. He could understand Shelley when, with Jane Williams, in a cockleshell of a boat, he suggested, "Now, let us together solve the great mystery."

Louis did not hesitate to get into all sorts and conditions of mischief to "see what it was like." No experience, good or bad, did he hear of, but

he must try to see it from his point of view. Sidney Colvin, writing of Robert Louis Stevenson, says: "A restless and inquiring conscience kept him inwardly calling in question the grounds of conduct and the accepted codes of society, and he himself says he was of a conversable temper and insatiably curious in the aspects of life, and spent much of his time scraping acquaintance with all classes of men and womenkind."

His father, in his college days, gave him two shillings and sixpence a week for pocket-money. "A man can't help being sober and moral on that," he said ruefully to a friend, holding out the dole. This friend, meeting him years after by Australasian seas, reminded him of the scene, and Louis laughed merrily. He said he had forgotten it, but the mention of the very street-corner where they had talked, when he thirsted for foresights of life, brought it all back to him. Mr. Stevenson was far from being miserly, so no doubt he had excellent reason for his limited allowance to his son. Louis had his comfortable home. Unlike most fathers, Mr. Stevenson urged his son in vain to run up a tailor's bill for suitable clothes.

Louis also could get on credit anything within reason at the shops his parents patronized; but he had proved he could be reckless of money out of curiosity, "just to feel what it was like to be a spendthrift," as readily as he would waste his emotions without sense of proportion. Two friends of his, to curb their extravagance in dress and superfluous knick-knacks, never bought anything without notifying the fact to one another. Louis enjoyed the letters which passed between them, demanding liberty to make a purchase. He said he could not join them, as he had no money to spend, and the only shops that tempted him were the booksellers' and jewellers'. He liked precious stones for their sparkle and colour, and wished he could be a Rajah or Indian potentate, and go daily decked with strings of gems. If he had wished to join the Club to which his intimates belonged, Mr. Stevenson would have paid his entrance fee, and provided him with funds to enjoy himself there; but a Princes Street Club Louis despised. He preferred rather vagabondish haunts of his own in Edinburgh, but the Savile Club in London, of which he was a member,

he found congenial. His Edinburgh hero, John Nicholson, goes to Colette's, which had nothing much to recommend it, for it had an "unsavoury interior," where John found several members of the Junior Bar, not very sober, sitting round a table at a coarse meal served on a dirty table-cloth. But Colette, being a contraband hotel-keeper, had an attraction. When they had all been marched off to the police office for drinking at this arch shebeener's, they adjourned to one of the crest-fallen company's rooms in Castle Street, "where (for that matter) they might have had quite as good a supper and far better drink than in the dangerous paradise from which they had been routed." Louis took this sketch from his own experience. He used to enjoin all members of the Republic to affirm that he had been in their realm, if they were asked by his parents if Louis had been in talking late the previous evening, and many a time when his latch-key was used at unwarranted hours, he laid the blame on our smoking-room.

When plans for a tour with his friends were discussed by the winter's fire, and the projects and

probable expenses told to Mr. Stevenson, he gave his hearty sanction and liberal funds, so his once upon a time paltry two shillings and sixpence a week must not be harshly judged, or Louis's father thought to have been unduly stingy.

"It was a comfortable thought to me that I had a father," Louis says in his tale of the College Magazine, when he saw, despite his "lips smiling publicly," that this literary essay was to be a grim fiasco. When failure came, he says, "the necessary interview with my father passed off not amiss."

Mr. Stevenson loved his only son, and that love caused him much disquietude. Both love and duty made him anxious to guide and keep his boy on the right road. Louis had, however, a mania for by-paths which were not, unfortunately, in the "narrow way" in which his father wished him to walk. Once, when Louis's conduct caused a serious breach, Mr. Stevenson, to recall him from what he deemed "the broad road," stopped the liberal funds he had given to his son. The good man was puzzled that his prodigal was not starved into returning. On the contrary, he continued to fare sumptuously, like the rich man, if

not spending his substance in riotous living. An audacious friend of Louis's, who knew the whys and wherefores of the father's conduct, told Mr. Stevenson that he knew that if Louis, for want of funds, had to rough it, and fell ill, Mr. Stevenson would reproach himself, so he had advanced him some money, fully assured parental displeasure would melt, and the engineer repay him with interest. It says much for Mr. Stevenson's generosity and fairness of judgment that when he had looked on the matter from his son's point of view, he repaid the money advanced, recalled the unrepentant prodigal, and killed the fatted calf.

Anything the least out of the common in fact or fancy attracted Louis's attention, and he was always pursuing some chimera. Two queer quirks of his are noted and known. He once knew a girl born on a twenty-ninth of February, who constantly complained that she had only a birthday every four years, so Louis gave her as a present the 13th of November, as he said he had no further use for it. He drew up a deed in due legal form, and so endowed her with an annual feast-day. This Adelaide M. Ide, so strangely

gifted with a birthday, died lately in Samoa. His step-daughter, also "his friend and scribe," tells how her mother and his cousin, Graham Balfour, were proposing in Samoa to exchange consciences. "Louis was watching the transaction with interest, and suggested that the business might be developed, and that a trade journal might be started, where consciences could be advertised for sale or exchange. He himself, he added, might be very glad to avail himself of such facilities, and he wondered what his own conscience would look like in print. 'Oh,' said his cousin, 'let me try.' 'For sale, a conscience, half calf, slightly soiled, gilt-edged (or shall we say uncut?), scarce and curious.'"

This was the kind of drollery Louis loved of old. Endless were his freakish fancies. After the *Inland Voyage* had been successfully accomplished, he was full of a project to buy a barge, and saunter through the canals of Europe, Venice being the far-off terminus. A few select shareholders in this scheme were chosen, mostly artists, for the barge plan was projected in the mellow autumnal days at a painters' camp in Fontaine-

bleau Forest. The company were then all in the bloom of their youth. They were to paint fame-enduring pictures, as they leisurely sailed through life and Europe, and when bowed, grey-bearded, bald-headed men, they were to cease their journeyings at Venice. There, before St. Mark's, a crowd of clamorously eager picture-dealers and lovers of art were to be waiting to purchase the wonderful work of the wanderers. The scene in the piazza of St. Mark's, on the barge's arrival, the throng of buyers, the hoary-headed artists, tottering under the weight of canvases, was pictured by the historian of the voyage. The barge was bought, but bankruptcy stared the shareholders in the face. The patrons of art of that day had no leanings towards the work of the shareholders, and no first breath of success had come yet to the one author among them. The barge was arrested, and with it the canoes which had earned an immortal fame through the Arethusa's pen. They were redeemed by Cigarette from a debtor's prison, the barge sold, and the company wound up.

At this time he had much of his future work simmering in his brain. One evening he broke

out into a species of Jekyl and Hyde plot. Deacon Brodie, the hypocritical villain, who appeared as a pillar of the Church, and an able craftsman before his fellow-townsmen, and was really a gambler and burglar, suggested to Tusitala the two-sidedness of human character, "commingled out of good and evil," the smug front to the world, the villain behind the mask. The story of Burke and Hare's atrocious murders had a fascination for him too, and so had many other tales of old Edinburghers, or tales of Edinburgh itself; for the city is a grey recorder of unforgotten history. "The great North Road," full of highwaymen, was to be the scene and name of a future novel. Louis's route north, if I remember aright, was to be by Berwick and York. The London Road, an outlet from Edinburgh, suggested the commencement of the journey. On a sloppy winter's day Louis stopped to admire the name, "Val de Travers," which was then printed in brass on asphalt pavements. It pleased him to see that, though the name was trodden under foot, it shone in letters of gold from out of the mud. He said he would use that undimmable name for a hero of his in some

story, and imagined him in various situations. He had a long memory for all sorts of things which had arrested his attention, but he must have forgotten Val de Travers, for he has never raised him from out of the pavement and set him on our shelves.

"This is a poison bad world for the romancer, this Anglo-Saxon world. I usually get out of it by not having any woman in it at all; but when I remember I had the *Treasure of Franchard* refused as unfit for a family magazine, I feel despair weigh upon my wrists," he complained from Vailima.

Very early in his career, some of his boon companions lamented that he was somewhat of a cowardly humbug, for he judiciously kept his Jekyl reputation so much before the innocent public that the Hyde in him, which they knew, was never suspected. They said they could not find a passage in any of his books with even a suggestion of Hyde in it. They persisted that he had so cultivated a pure Dr. Jekyl style, that he could not abandon it if he wished, and they, though not all penmen, could write a novel with a more than doubtful plot better than he, the rising author.

Their scorn of his Jekyl mask, their boast that they could beat him with his own weapons, put him on his mettle. He avoided their company for some weeks, and laboured sedulously at a novel which would out-Herod Herod. He laid it before them, and they were startled with its strength, its terribleness, its outrageous blackness of human depravity. He was radiant: he had surprised them. The MS. book was kept by one "life-long friend" of his. He had it bound as the *History of Peru*. The efforts of Louis's companions, which were school-girl reading in comparison, figured on the same shelf as the *History of Mexico*. They looked so sallow and dull, no one, said their possessor, would take them from their place. Comparatively recently they still existed. Louis, though flattered at the time by their favourable criticisms, bitterly regretted he had entered the list on such a foul tournament, and asked for his work back to commit it to the flames, for fear that it should ever become public. But the "life-long friend" being of a speculative, tormenting turn, held to the manuscript. He said he could black-mail the author whenever he wished by threats of

publication. Louis, to the end of his days, pled in vain for the reams he had sullied his pen over, and wisely resolved never again to play the part of Hyde with the tell-tale indelibleness of ink.

Louis had never any inclination for outdoor sports or pastimes. Riding along the hard roads round Edinburgh did not strike his fancy, though in Samoa, Mr. Bazett Haggard says, he was the second best rider on the island, and he enjoyed nothing better than a gallop on his horse. Skating was the one outdoor amusement he enjoyed, though he never became very proficient at it. Like a crab he could move backwards, but a straightforward course on the ice took him a long time to accomplish. He liked watching others at their intricate figure-cutting, or skimming along in swallow-like flights.

The clear exhilarating air and the good spirits of every one contented him. Town ponds he did not care to frequent, but when Duddingston bore he abandoned work, and spent his days there. He watched the curlers, though his interest in the rink was not in the destination of the booming stones,

but in the jovial faces of the players, and the broad Scotch terms which seemed part and parcel of the roaring game. One winter of continued frost we went daily out of Edinburgh by train to skate on an unfrequented sheet of ice, and Louis joined us. It was at the village in which my father had been born and reared. His remaining brother used to watch for us as the Edinburgh train arrived, and Louis, quick to notice and sympathize, observed how the old man's kindly face lit up with pleasure when he spied us. Louis complained he had no distinctive career, not even a surname of his own, at Bathgate; for our Uncle Sandy never could remember his name, and called him "the poor shilpit laddie," and the village schoolboys, who came to slide, pointed him out as the "foreigner" or "yon skinny ane." When he took off his cloak, and began to warm himself by gliding on the black ice, he looked very slight among the buirdly curlers.

"Why," said he one day, "does that dear old gentleman, your uncle, think I've the appetite of a prize-fighter, or is he a cannibal? He piles my plate with corned beef and keeps it piled. All your

other friends who go in with you to what he calls 'tea,' and which I call a cold banquet, he allows to eat, drink, and be merry in their own way, but he keeps watching and stuffing me. To-day he says he thinks I'm fatter." We explained that our uncle, having befriended our father when he was an impecunious student in Edinburgh, had ever a generous solicitude for any he thought struggling to keep themselves at college, and he could not be convinced that "that poor shilpit-like laddie," as he called his nephew's friend, was not an impecunious student of foreign extraction. It was in vain we told him Louis had a doting father and mother alive, and was a born and bred Edinburgher. "They might give him a great-coat," suggested our uncle. "Poor creature! I don't like to see him with only that old curtain to wrap round him."

Louis was fond of walking, but golf did not strike him as an attractive addition to that exercise. It appeared to him very poor amusement to interrupt meditation or talk to hit a ball, and he was an unsympathetic listener only when his friends began discussing their strokes when their day's

sport was done. Golf, too, in these Edinburgh days of his, was more confined to Scotland. It was then a Calvinistic sport, stern and hardy. Wind-shaven whins swallowed up balls, and there were no lawn-like inland courses with green velvet turf. If Louis had fancied it at all, he would have liked it when it was played on the sea links, with the tingle of the salt on one's lips, but out of doors his attention was all given to word painting. He had, when a boy, summering at North Berwick, followed Robert Chambers, junior, round the links; and years after, wishing to help a friend who wanted to contribute to *Chambers' Journal*, he wrote him the following letter:—

"DEAR SIR,—I do not know if you ever observed me, but I have more than once followed your triumphant progress round a golfing green, and though this would hardly stand for an introduction, I daresay you know me by name. The paper enclosed is by a friend of mine, and it seemed to me very suitable to *Chambers' Journal*. Will you look at it and let me know? This is a very incongruous letter altogether. The last incongruity is

that I should put this infinitesimal rag of paper into such a mighty continent as the envelope.

"Yours truly,

"ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON."

When the daylight visibly increased, after the new year, Louis liked to wander about his native city. The Calton Hill, he held, was a comprehensive place from which to contemplate it, for then you had Arthur's Seat with its "house of kings" at its feet, and the long ridge of the old town bristling with spires—a romance in stone and lime from the Castle to Holyrood. The beauty of the scene in sunshine or haar pleased him, however much he complained of its scowling weather. On Sunday afternoons we went further afield. Duddingston village, lying at the back of the leonine green hill, away from the city's traffic, found special favour in his sight. One day, as he looked down on it from the road by Dunsappie, he expressed a sudden desire to have rooms there, in its peaceful out-of-world quiet, and waken to the song of birds. This poetic sentiment his father nipped in the bud, by telling him he could hearken (season providing)

to the first low matin chirp of early feathered singers in his own room at Heriot Row, for the gardens there were full of thrushes and blackbirds. Rest and Be Thankful, on Corstorphine Hill, was our usual Sunday walk—that well-fended crook on its wooded slope, where David and Alan parted.

The Hawes Inn, Queensferry, which figures in the *Antiquary*, also known as the place where Louis's hero David was "Kidnapped," was another of Robert Louis Stevenson's favoured resorts. The travellers crossing the Forth Bridge, taking a bird's-eye view of that hostelry, have disturbed the privacy of its hawthorn-hedged garden. Louis liked it for its retiredness and old-world air. He never saw it after the railway had disturbed it by bridging the Forth. The Dean Bridge, across which we invariably went on Sunday, was to Louis an unfailing source of pleasure. Looking over the west side (and he always would pause to look) lay the village the town had passed over, still a village of mills, with the roar of the weir, and the river lapping close up to the main-street doorways. On the east side there was the view of the terraced

valley on which the fashionable places and crescents of houses had defiantly turned their backs, and, immediately below the bridge, a white mill and a dark mill lade. "The dusty miller comes to his door, looks at the gurgling water, hearkens to the turning wheel, and the birds whistling about the shed, and perhaps whistles an air of his own to enrich the symphony, for all the world as if Edinburgh were still the old Edinburgh on the Castle Hill, and Dean were still the quietest of hamlets buried a mile or so in the green country," writes Louis, speaking of his favourite "little rural village of Dean," which has not been smothered in the annihilating arms of greedy Edinburgh, but by its lowly site still survives in the heart of its west end. The mill of Greenbank is gone. With the quiet of Hawes Inn, it has fallen before *fin de siècle* improvements.

Louis was never exiled from his old haunts, however. He had a Peter Ibbetson knack of dreaming true. The fickle South did not obliterate from his memory the skinning nor'-easter we ofttimes met on that bridge, blowing direct

from the ocean. Catriona lived somewhere near the village of Dean, and David Balfour found his way thither. When he sent David and Alan eastwards from Silvermills, one feels, as one goes with them to the sandy dunes of Gullane, the hale sting of the wind, sees the colouring crudely bright in the caller air, and breathes with them the invigorating atmosphere of that coast. Louis always dreamed true. Sometimes it was of his yachting days on the west coast, of the heat of a Highland day when it *is* hot, such a heat as his Highland fugitives experienced when they baked "like scones on a girdle," imprisoned on the rock in the glen by the watchful soldiers. "Very odd these identities of sensation and the world of connotations implied," he writes from Vailima, when the rain from the westward bespattering his verandah had sent over him "a wave of extraordinary and apparently baseless emotion" and thoughts of Scotland. He complained that though he lived a voluntary exile he had his "head filled with the beastly place all the time." That morning the smell of the peats came back to him, the sentiment of the Highland

scenery, "the rain on the wet moorland belike," and he felt "the romance of the past, and that indescribable bite of the whole thing at a man's heart." His last two heroes lived in his grey town, or sought shelter near by among his well-loved hills. He recalled these familiar scenes in all their vividness, so that his hope was in a manner realized; he beheld again in dying those "Hills of Home." Truly he sang—

> "The tropics vanish, meseems that I
> From Halker side, from topmost Allermuir,
> Or steep Caerketton dreaming, gaze again."

With this tenacious imagination of his, this Peter Ibbetson hidden gift which he could exercise at will, he never was exiled; however far in body he was from the land where his forefathers slept, he aye had a blink of his "ain countrie." "It is a singular thing that I should live here in the South Seas," he says in a letter to Mr. Barrie, a few weeks before his death, "and yet my imagination so continually inhabit the cold, old huddle of grey hills from which we came."

The glimpses of country and fields seen from the heart of Edinburgh were always noted and

appreciated by Louis. The closes, which were like gaps in tall cliffs, were as frames to upright vistas of the sea and the Fife Lomonds. Or escaping down from the Parliament House after breathing "dust and bombazine" for a few hours, and finding it the most arduous form of idleness, Louis, rejoicing in the clear pungent air, would descend from the Mound, stirred with delight at the sight of the Highland mountains, hoary with their first powdering of snow. The sights which gave him a feeling of freedom from town fetters—the smell of the plough in his nostrils, the cry of the moorland birds in winter shelter, the ample leisure at his disposal to grind at his apprenticeship of letters in the seventies—offered some measure of compensation for a climate which he found so uncongenial, though in the long run it would doubtless have been of more enduring benefit than the deceptive seductiveness of the luscious South. His "first draught of consideration" for his literary ability was when he was asked to be one of the four editors of the *Edinburgh University Magazine*, of which he tells us in one of his retrospective papers. There were

some well-known names among the contributors which should have helped this venture to live longer. Professor Blackie, Principal Tulloch, Dr. Joseph Bell, that able wielder of pen or lancet, and some other standard names. Its failure sent Louis back, as he says, "from the printed author to the manuscript student," and but for *Roads*, *Ordered South*, and some other short pieces, we had to wait a few years till he compiled his *Inland Voyage*. *Treasure Island*, written some six years after, was the first ship that brought home any weight of gold to his treasury. He took his journey in the *Arethusa* in 1876, and wrote of it in the following months. That winter, too, he was planning further vagrant travels—this time to the Cevennes. In 1875 his door plate, engraved "R. L. Stevenson, Advocate," was put up in Heriot Row. Neither his legal studies nor walking the boards of the Parliament House, waiting for hire, interfered with his literary work, and the long vacations gave him time for nomadic rambles. He had a deed box in the Parliament House, a gown and a wig. Occasionally he filled the two latter, but gradually

they, like the box, remained empty. At first, when all was new, the old-world air of the Law Courts, the quiet seclusion in the library below, the legal feet, the novelty of dressing up in the guise of an advocate, attracted him. Once he was told a clerk was looking for him to give him a brief. He tore off his advocate's robes and fled, and was only lured back, some while after when his friends confessed the brief was a myth.

Notwithstanding his bad health, he seemed able to take holidays in a very Crusoe fashion, winter or summer. He enjoyed walking tours, and went through Ayrshire in mid-winter. In these years, despite his complaints, he was really fairly unfettered. He had time for the liberty he craved for. Knapsack on back he would realize his song, and start off with the—

"Jolly heaven above and the byway nigh."

The Courts rose in March for a month or more, and August and September were holiday times. Louis had no cases to work up, no legal pot-boiling to do in the way of reports, no work as *locum tenens* to a Sheriff, such as the Junior Bar looked for hungrily. If he had not been forced to

leave the tale half told, his knowledge of Scots Law would have enabled him to try to condemn Archie Weir in due legal form, and to see that Lord Hermiston conducted himself on the bench as beseemed a Lord of Session. He studied well as a law student, and had a knowledge and grasp of dry technicalities which no one credited him with, for no one ever saw him show any interest in legal proceedings. He never pled, and did no more than look into the Parliament House to see a friend or read a book, once his gown was no novelty.

Lord Braxfield's portrait was not bequeathed in Louis's day to the hall of the Courts of Justice where now it rests, but Louis studied it when it was in the Raeburn Exhibition. His freshness of remembrance, his knack of making people see from his point of vision, stood him in good stead when he made Braxfield into Hermiston. The correct legal knowledge he somehow imbibed during his fitful appearances in wig and gown shows he must have given some attention to it, and that knowledge of his recognised profession is reflected in every line of Weir of Hermiston.

Travel Songs

"Give to me the life I love,
Let the lave go by me;
Give me the jolly heaven above,
And the byway nigh me.
Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o'er me,
Give the face of earth around
And the road before me."

—*Songs of Travel.*

CHAPTER XI

Travel Songs

IN one of his essays on a walking tour in Ayrshire, Louis speaks of Maybole and the ballad of 'Johnne Faa," the king of Scottish Gipsies and Earl of Little Egypt, by a charter from James V. The Lady of Cassilis, in her high turret, heard the Eastern wanderers sing, and their music arousing old memories and the wild blood in her, she left her husband's castle to follow them. "Even," says Louis, "if the tale be not true of this or that lady, or this or that old tower, it is true in the essence of all men and women; for all of us, sometime or other, hear the gipsies singing, over all of us is the glamour cast. Some resist and sit resolutely by the fire. Most go, and are brought back again like Lady Cassilis. A few of the tribe of Waring go and are seen no

more; only now and again, at spring-time, when the gipsies' song is afloat in the amethyst evening, we can catch their voices in the glee." Louis's hearing was alert. The Romany music sounded in his ears, and he cast off the strait jacket of convention, arose from the feather bed of civilization, and set off when the first breath of spring reached the North. His cousin, R. A. M. Stevenson, was an artist, and his comrade Cigarette had a brother who lived part of the year at Fontainebleau studying the same profession. The two Edinburgh advocates, glad to be rid of their little-worn gowns and wigs, joined their kinsmen in the refreshing greenery of the forest at some painters' camp which Louis has so well described in his papers on Fontainebleau. "Our society," he says, "was full of high spirits, of laughter, and of the initiative of youth. The few elder men who joined us were still young at heart, and took the key from their companions. It was a good place and a good life for any naturally-minded youth; better yet for the student of painting, and perhaps, best of all, for the student of letters."

The attraction to the artists at Barbizon, when they pitched their camp at Siron's, was Millet. The great man had just died, Louis says, when first he went there. He was at Barbizon before Millet's death, but perhaps not as a resident for any length of time. Mr. Will Low, the American artist, speaking of his student days in Paris, says: "In the summer, 1874, the two Stevensons, as they were known, the cousins Robert Louis and Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson (the author of the recent *Life of Velasquez*, and the well-known writer on art), were in Barbizon. Millet was not much more than a name to my friends that day when we talked over our coffee in the garden at Siron's Inn. They had seen little or none of his work. I ventured across the road, knocked at the little green door, and asked permission to bring my friends, which was accorded." The Stevensons had been insisting that all the great artists were passed away. Mr. Low held that giants still walked the earth. He clinched his argument by taking them to Millet's. "In half an hour," he says, "I was witness of an object-lesson, of which the teacher was serenely un-

conscious. Of my complete triumph when we left there was no doubt, though one of my friends rather begged the question by insisting I had taken an unfair advantage, and that, as he expressed it, 'it was not in the game, in an ordinary discussion between gentlemen, concerning minor poets, to drag Shakespeare in, in that way.'"

At Fontainebleau Louis roved at will, or loafed in the sunshine, read and wrote little and talked much of an evening, for he had able antagonists to grapple with in argument. Mr. Low says: "If Louis Stevenson was the most wonderful talker in the world, as he certainly was, then certainly 'Bob' Stevenson was second to him." But many who knew both these gipsy-looking Stevenson cousins in these days, gave Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson the palm for being more original and spontaneous, and not so persistent in his search after startling themes, but lighting on them unawares. Mr. Low goes on to say that if Robert Louis had died then, or never accomplished anything in his life, he would have regarded him as a great and won-

derful personage with the same feeling as he has for him to-day. Mr. Low asserts to an editor of an American magazine that "young Stevenson exercised over himself, and all the others of their circle, the strangest kind of magnetic power." They all felt, as he did, that they were in the presence of an intellect far beyond them. There was something akin to worship in the feeling entertained by them for Stevenson, and yet Low admits that he and Louis were always quarrelling on all possible subjects; "they loved each other, yet they argued and fought continually." Mr. Low had more discernment than most, for, among the men who now sit in Weir of Hermiston's place on the bench, or plead before the judges of to-day, and who knew Louis in these his Edinburgh days, I have heard many candidly own they neither particularly liked Louis, nor ever dreamed that he would rise to any eminence. He hid his lights a good deal under a bushel; frank as he appeared in his talk, there was a vein of hidden secretiveness, half bashful, about him, though he was not troubled with national shyness. In his legal days he

seldom mentioned his patient toiling for mastery over his chosen craft. He fostered the idea that he was a consummate idler, light-hearted and thoughtless, sadly wanting in stability, with no object in life but to "gang his ain gait," and his ways were out of the common ken. Some of his fellow-artists, too, at Barbizon do not recall any special admiration for Robert Louis Stevenson then; for, like his shrewd Edinburgh confrères, men of culture and discernment, they did not bestow much notice on him. His ability to weld his ideas into specific language made him a peerless speaker, and of an evening his thoughts, translated into decorative words, entertained them when they listened. They were all young, self-absorbed, and an Artist of Letters was not held of much account among those whose thoughts were given to the palette and brush. Louis's mannerisms and oddities in dress were quite commonplace in a colony of unconventional beings, and there also, as in Edinburgh, he was not a general favourite. Even the friends of his youth, who knew him well, liked him for his lovable, genial gaiety, and were attracted to him

by his eager enthusiasm more than by any forewarning that their comrade was likely to be distinguished. They looked on him with affection, such as they might concede to a child, half in pity for the irresponsible evanescence of its spirits, yet liking its merry carelessness. Sidney Colvin, speaking of Louis when they first met, says: "He was at that time a lad of twenty-two, with his powers not yet set, nor his way of life determined. But to know him was to recognise at once that here was a young genius of whom great things might be expected. A slender, boyish presence, with a graceful, somewhat fantastic bearing, and a singular power and attraction in the eyes and smile, were the signs that first impressed you; and the impression was quickly confirmed and deepened by the charm of his talk, which was irresistibly sympathetic and inspiring, and not less full of matter than of mirth."

So it seems some instinctively foresaw, and some, who were by no means dull of perception, were blind to his future and were not captivated by him in the present. Let it be remembered

that in Edinburgh Louis Stevenson, during his quarter of a century or more of residence there, was little known. He kept aloof from people and pleasures in his own circle, forming an enthusiastic admiration and worship for a few. "Yon daft laddie Stevenson," a janitor at the Parliament House spoke of him as, and many who knew him by sight, in "his own romantic town," as Thomas Stevenson's son, thought it an apt description of the youth who ran counter to all accepted formulas and customs, and prided himself on being a bit of a Pariah in the stately city of his birth.

Louis was always more liked by his seniors. Those of his own age, or younger, were not tolerant of fondness for talking. His charming fluency of speech prejudiced many against him, for in company in these days he strained to attract attention by his power of eloquence, and only a few knew how excellent and sympathetic a listener he could be. He attitudinized in his twenties as a sparkling, flighty speaker, and those of his own years had no patience with his sudden raptures, his almost hysterical

sensitiveness over a sad story or a too realistic drama. In the artists' camps, however, they understood his changeable moods, his ecstasies, his ebullitions, and if a phonograph had been in Siron's, at Barbizon, or Chevillon's, at Gretz, when he, invigorated by the out-door life in the spacious woodlands, talked till morning, that phonograph would have given us much of his strange surmises racily worded. In his *Vailima Letters* there is an unpeptonised strength of expression which recalls to those who knew him his every-day style of speech.

If a phonograph could have recalled his voice, the familiar accent of his country and his mind, untoned into the smooth cadence of words he put before us in print, a cinematograph would have been the only means to recall his appearance. He was all life and movement, and his expression ever changed as he spoke. His bright but wan oval face lit up then, the wine of youth (for he never would have been old if he had lived his allotted threescore and ten) mounted to his thin cheeks, and the glory of soul radiated from his beaming black eyes. Then the mercurial

movements of his hands were part of his speech; they were emphasis, interrogation marks, italics to his phrases. It is singular that, living, as he did, for many a week together in spring and autumn among artists, none ever sketched him, though they were on the constant outlook for striking subjects for their brush. Notwithstanding Mr. Low's eulogy, and his belief that his fellows regarded Robert Louis Stevenson "with something akin to worship," none of them sought to immortalize him on what each hoped were their immortal canvases. I have heard many who were of that jovial crew there, say that neither Louis Stevenson's unique face nor his art of talking impressed them much. They noted his feebleness of frame, and liked his courageous gaiety in the face of physical weakness. "I wonder," he asks, "if ever any one had more energy upon so little strength?" One portrait was done of him at Fontainebleau, not on canvas, but on the white walls of Chevillon's salon at Gretz. It was a caricature, but at the same time an unmistakable likeness. Louis was portrayed shivering on the brink of the river, preparing to dive, but shrinking

from the leap, his shoulders shrugged, and his hands drooping limply from the wrists in protesting supplication. The figure was outlined in black. It accentuated his deplorable leanness, added a few inches to the length of his hair, and made it stray in unkempt locks over his brow.

Louis in these days was no sketcher. *The Studio* gave in the winter number 1896–97, some pictures of his, clever outlines, some done, it is said, in Davos. Whether he had cultivated an ability to wield his pencil later, as he learned the flageolet, or whether his hostages to fortune helped him, I know not. But at Barbizon the artists' community offered the two aliens in their camp, the Cigarette and the Arethusa, a prize for the best landscape. It had been discovered that Cigarette could draw the old-fashioned valentine—heart pierced by Cupid's dart—but the Arethusa's anatomy was undoubtedly faulty and the Blind Boy's arrow in his hands underwent serpentine contortions. Still Arethusa said he could draw, at any rate better than the Cigarette, and so the contest was arranged. The luxuriant

tangle of the forest, the glades, or some woodland veteran standing out alone in leafy prominence, the competitors refused to attempt. Finally, a wall was fixed on as their *motif*. Most of the onlookers backed the Arethusa; the fervour with which he entered into criticism of his friends' pictures, his very looks which made him appear as one of themselves, inclined them to believe he would win. He settled down to his task, smiling and confident, while Cigarette, his pipe well between his teeth, sat silent, and steadily worked. His rival chattered as he glanced at the *motif*, and had hardly a hand left to draw with as he flourished his pencil like a conductor's wand, and used the other hand as a species of telescope to focus with, as he had seen others do. The result was that Louis lost. His wall was quite incomprehensible, while my brother had got his clearly built and the stones put in, in a heavy-handed, firm manner, properly shaded too. This primitive prize study was called from its stolidity the Scotch Dyke. Stevenson was disappointed, but owned he was honestly beaten. The artists encouraged these

two novices at their trade to continue their studies, but Robert Louis Stevenson's work remained ludicrously hopeless, and he never could be taught to outline his wounded heart and its damaging dart aright. Mrs. Fleeming Jenkin, in *The Edinburgh Academy Chronicle* of March, 1895, speaking of a visit to Robert Louis Stevenson at Skerryvore in 1885 and subsequent years, says: "He was then very ill, but his beautiful gaiety never failed him, and his own sufferings seemed but to make him the more tender to his friends. He invented many pastimes for himself and them. At one time he modelled little clay figures, beginning them in one intention, and then humorously changing it to suit their changing appearance. *He could not draw a stroke.*"

Louis, if his fingers refused to sketch, could always portray in words, and he had a special gift in fixing on appropriate names. Among them in the forest came one called Violet le Duc. This man pricked up his ears when he heard the English colony speak his name at table. Louis saw this, so he called a meeting of his countrymen and those who spoke the mother tongue,

explained how Violet le Duc hearkened suspiciously to the sound of his name, but how without a breach of good manners they could continue to remark on his work if they would but adopt his suggestion. Violet le Duc would have, when mentioned among the English-speaking community, to discard his ducal coronet, and be known in future as Primrose the Earl, by which equally spring-like title they discussed him freely, while he within earshot remained happily unconscious.

Many of the artists were musical, but Louis Stevenson took no part in their impromptu concerts. He liked their songs and rattling refrains, but he was no singer, nor had he much of an ear for music. He would attempt to pick out a tune with one finger on the piano. He says he had a rudimentary acquaintance with "Auld Lang Syne" and the "Wearing of the Green." He makes David and his forebear at Pilrig have a musical ear, for the Laird received David Balfour "in the midst of learned works and musical instruments, for he was not only a deep philosopher, but much of a musician."

Flageolet-playing, a later accomplishment, or one hidden like his sketching, was one of his impulsive whims,—an experiment undertaken to see if he liked making music, as he had once before experimented to see if he could like the cageful of unrestful avadavats.

A fancy for gardening, that "purest of human pleasures," came on him in his later years, and he found it, as Bacon said, "the greatest refreshment to the spirit of man." In the well-planted garden at Swanston he took no practical interest in the growth of the flowers till, in course of the season, their fully developed beauty burst on him, and they sweetened the air with their perfume. But at Vailima the gardening fever came on him strongly. In a letter to Dr. Bakewell he said: "However, I am off work this month, and occupy myself in weeding cacao, papa chases, and the like. My long, silent contests in the forest have had a strange effect on me." Much of his gardening struggles are recorded in *Vailima Letters*. He had the tropical rapidity of vegetation to contend with, and a primeval growth of weeds to subdue. He liked difficulties, for in spite of his physical

disabilities he had a stubborn doggedness about him. A long-cared-for garden never tempted him to adopt Robert Young's trade, but the untutored wealth of his own domain incited him to action, and, like the settlers, he set to work on the hard task to tame the wilderness.

At Fontainebleau he entered sympathetically into the artists' struggles, and he envied them their complacent contentment, whether their day's work had been successful or not, comparing it with the reproaches he inflicted on himself if, after labouring with his pen, his pages were not up to his ideal. His comrades, especially the foreigners, at Siron's or Chevillon's, were suavely polite, and Louis liked polish, French or otherwise. He found, however, that when a wind of adversity blew, his own "brither Scots" were, like the Douglases, "tender and true." He was a strange mixture of nervous, womanish fears, along with that braveness which enabled him to face ill-health smilingly and reap a harvest of happiness in the Land of Counterpane, a task which would have baffled most strong men. In his forest wanderings he had encountered midges,

which distracted him sadly when he was enjoying visions, searching new ways to enter that House Beautiful of his dreams. The forest also hid other enemies in ambush—the tics which brush off the ferns on to passers-by. He acquired one of these, and in an anxious horror rushed into the salon crying that a wart had appeared on his arm which, like the "Fat Boy" in *Pickwick*, was "visibly swelling." They told him laughingly it was a blood-sucking forest inhabitant, at which the highly strung Louis became panic-stricken. Cummy often had seen these exaggerated terrors take possession of the small boy she had nursed, but even the profusely commiserating foreign artists present laughed as they saw their gay Stevenson in tears. They thought he was so affected for their amusement, but this frenzy was no Stevensonian trick to attract attention. The first to realize that Louis's uncontrolled fear was not mockery was his trusty friend the Cigarette. He tried to reassure the distraught Arethusa by telling him that a like fate befel many, that Taureau, the bull-dog, survived, though daily he came in with a crop of vampirish tics

on him, which made his master and Coco, the monkey, pay him such close attention. Finally, he extracted the foreign body from the weeping Arethusa, who was duly grateful. But it was a subject the blithe R. L. S. would not take a comic view of, for when the artists jested on it later he paled at the mention of the scene.

Taureau, the bull-dog, recalls how Robert Louis's beggarly clothes exceeded the usual degree of artistic nondescriptness. The dog was ill, and heat and care were the prescription. Madame Chevillon was attentive to her four-legged boarder. She saw him shiver, and the kindly Frenchwoman looked for something to wrap him in. She took what came nearest her hand, which happened to be Louis's well-known velveteen jacket. It was a warm August day, and he enjoyed the freedom of sitting without his coat, and had flung his outer garment on to the bench. When evening came he hunted for his old, derided friend in every conceivable place. Madame had not seen it. She was tearful and dispirited over the dog. Louis continued his search till the waning day brought the artists back from their work, and

Taureau's master went straight to visit his sick dog. The velveteen was next the patient's skin, the ragged lining outside. He flung the unsightly wrap away from his favourite, and Louis spied his jacket on the floor. He was indignant at the use it had been put to, but Madame and Taureau's master held it was an insult that so valuable a dog had been equipped in such rags.

When he first knew Fontainebleau, Barbizon was the favoured artists' haunt, but its selectness and freedom having been spoilt by invaders, two men set out to look for other quarters, and came back reporting well of Gretz. There the river and the boats were specially novel attractions,— "something to do," they said, "when feeling averse to work." "The consistent idler," as Louis called himself, to disguise the fact that he was the hardest worker among them, "had no craving, like his brethren, after that something to do." All he wanted was to walk, to dream, to see, and to store his mind with what he saw. Speaking of the bathers and canoes at Gretz, he says they told a tale "of a society that has an eye to pleasure. Perhaps for that very reason I can

recall no such enduring ardours, no such glories of exhilaration as among the solemn groves and uneventful hours of Barbizon. This 'something to do' is a great enemy to joy; it is a way out of it; you wreak your high spirits on some cut-and-dry employment and behold them gone."

Gretz unawares became an important place to Louis. It was, so to speak, a cross-road on his way of life, and from there he took a route which led him away from the home and his friends "in the venerable city" which, he writes from Samoa, "I must always think of as my home." Louis was seldom in Edinburgh in summer. Swanston was too attractive to him. In summer his friends' canoes were launched on "the Forth's ample waters set with sacred isles," and after a day's sailing on the Firth they came home browned with the sea air. Gretz started Stevenson off on new journeyings. It suggested *An Inland Voyage*. In Gretz, too, one autumn, he had an experience which he never alluded to in his constant autobiographic peeps which are scattered through his pages. To the village on the outskirts of the forest came a travelling player and his wife,

half conjurors and half actors, who gave performances in Chevillon's and the neighbourhood. Louis Stevenson took one of his enthusiastic fits over this man, who told him tales, and assured his listener he was an Austrian count in disguise, while his wife was a Bulgarian. Louis came into the salon full of this romantic tale, and was offended at it being suggested that the conjuror was so well disguised no one could possibly have guessed his identity. He became enamoured of these charlatans, and took as a personal insult the ready laugh of the salon when a joker named the count and his wife the "Bulgarian Atrocities." Among the once-united coterie at Gretz there had by then been sown some dissension, so life did not run on such easy lines as formerly. Louis hotly upheld the authenticity of the Austrian count's pedigree. He attended all his performances, applauding loudly, walked, talked, and sat in Chevillon's kitchen hobnobbing with the ably disguised conjuror. There were people coming to Gretz whom Louis wished to avoid, so he suddenly announced his decision to accept an offer from the Bulgarian Atrocities, and

go a-touring with them. The gipsy glamour of a roving life was still unsatisfied by his other autumn travels. Louis Stevenson, to use a Scotch phrase, "kept a quiet sough" on his experiences as a merryandrew. He was supposed by his people to be among his artist friends, but when he returned to Chevillon's he was, for him, marvellously reticent on his adventures. All he admitted was that he played before French yokel audiences a part which was not of a high-class order—the part of a stupid Englishman whose mistakes in a foreign tongue were such as to appeal to the gallery. Only in the *Inland Voyage* did Louis give a hint of his knowledge of people like his disguised count. "I am pretty well acquainted with the ways of French strollers, more or less artistic," he says; and adds, "I have found them *singularly pleasant*," but, unlike his usual generosity in always sharing his pleasures with the public, on this occasion he kept them to himself.

For a delicate person Robert Louis took liberties with his constitution which were suicidal. Crossing the Atlantic and then the Plains as

an emigrant brought him very near the grave, in fact he never recovered from the effects of these voyages; but before these wretched experiences he had faced winter and rough weather on walking tours, and Modestine and he had not good camping-out weather in the Cevennes. This touring with mountebanks in France must have been rash for one so sickly as he, with no British grey-suited comrade in his wake with pockets adequately lined, to take him out of the clutches of gendarmes and see that he had decent meals and accommodation. If the scheme of the barge had not failed for want of funds, it would have been an ideal life for the migratory author. While thus yachting on land, as it were, there would always have been calm waters to traverse, no monotony as on the houseless ocean, many glimpses of happy home life as he glided past: such anonymous blessings as he describes as the Arethusa, "when ideas came and went like motes in a sunbeam, when trees and church spires along the banks surged up from time to time in my notice, like solid objects through a rolling cloud-land. Indeed, it lies so far from beaten paths

of language that I despair of getting the reader into the smiling, complaisant idiotcy of my condition.

The thirst to travel simply for the sake of moving, which Stevenson says assailed him, would have been assuaged. In a barge Louis could have had his home comforts, his books, his desk, about him, and thus journeyed with what Bailie Nicol Jarvie would have classed "as a' the comforts o' the Saut Market," through the opulent lands bordering whatever watery road he chose. If he had felt inclined to tarry in any tempting spot, a site for his movable house was always obtainable by the canal bank. A mad Highland woman whom Louis met on one of his knapsack wanderings, about 1870, told him his fortune. "All I could gather," he says, "may be thus summed up shortly: that I was to visit America, that I was to be very happy, and that I was to be much upon the sea—predictions which, in consideration of an uneasy stomach, I can scarcely think agreeable with one another." "The pythoness was right," he adds in 1887. "I have been happy. I did go to America (am going again, unless—), and I

have been twice, and once upon the deep." A barge life would have saved the search for health so far off on the Pacific where, instead of giving way to the lotus-eating indolence of the enervating climate, he worked harder than ever he did in the bracing North. Prophetically, at the end of *An Inland Voyage*, he says: "Now we were to return like the voyager in the play and see what re-arrangements fortune had perfected the while in our surroundings, what surprises stood ready-made for us at home, and whither and how far the world had voyaged in our absence. You may paddle all day long; but it is when you come back at nightfall, and look in at the familiar room, that you find Love or Death awaiting you beside the stove: and the most beautiful adventures are not those we go to seek."

From this journey, with those "fleet and footless beasts of burthen," the canoeists returned to Gretz, and there by the stove sat Love awaiting Robert Louis Stevenson. In *The Wrecker* there is an American, Loudon Dodd, whose father, seeing an opening for a man who could turn out statues to embellish Muskegon State public hall, orders

his son to learn sculpture. "I took up the statuary contract on our new capitol; I took it up first as a deal; and then it occurred to me it would be better to keep it in the family. There is considerable money in the thing, and it's patriotic," he explained to Loudon, and to Paris Loudon went. The real Loudon, one Mr. "Pardesous," was in truth despatched to "learn to sculp" for a hall in some State which awaited his works of art. One small statue of Freedom holding a banner was all he accomplished after his studies. He knew the artists and their haunt at Gretz, and in 1876 brought down there some ladies of his own nation, who were also in Paris studying art. Pardesous was recommended by habitués to take his compatriots to another hotel at Gretz. But to Chevillon's there came Mrs. Osbourne, her daughter Belle, and her son Sam, a lanky little boy, for ever growing out of his clothes. Sam was commonly known at Gretz as "Petit feesh," from the way he persistently spent his time angling for the inhabitants of the river; and when asked by the Gretz boys what he was catching, replied, "Petit feesh." These "petit feesh" (*Anglice*, minnows) he spent

much time over, cooking them by the stove, and constantly demanding a hairpin from his sister Belle as a spit. Mrs. Osbourne's cloudy hair was upheld by a piece of scarlet window-cord which contrasted well with its darkness. The Osbournes had been in Paris a year or two. Both mother and daughter were art students. Another son of Mrs. Osbourne's—"Herbie" I think his name was—had died in Paris, and his death had been a great grief to her. The artist colony were not best pleased by an American petticoat invasion. As Stevenson says: "Curious and not always edifying are the shifts that the French student uses to defend his lair; like the cuttlefish, he must sometimes blacken the waters of his chosen pool; but at such a time and for so practical a purpose Mrs. Grundy must allow him license."

However, the Osbournes had worked at Julien's studio with many who were at Chevillon's, and they were predisposed in their favour. Miss Osbourne had once gone to a Quartier Latin fancy ball, given by an American, dressed as a nugget of gold. The host at this dance was one who appears in *The Wrecker* as Romney. He was

pathetically impecunious, older than most of his fellows. "I'm poor, I'm old, I'm bald!" he exclaimed one day in despair. He lived on fare as spare as many a starving Scotch student, substituting potatoes for meal. Taureau's master gave him the sabots the Luxembourg authorities complained of as too noisy for their gallery. Even at Siron's the precarious state of his clothes was a subject of disquietude. Some windfall had come his way, and so he decided to have a junketing once in a way for his friends. Great were the difficulties Miss Osbourne experienced in removing the effects of the gilding next day from her locks. Several barbers told her that no washing would restore her hair to its original colour; soap and water only had the effect of making it a sickly green. Sympathetic partners accompanied her in her search for something to remove the tarnished shade from her head, and at last a capable chemist supplied a remedy. The Nugget of Gold had captivated the hearts of several of the artists. Monsieur Julien described his pupil as "a swabble of eyes and teeth." Her stepfather, speaking in rhyme of her in Samoa, endorses this portrait in words:—

"Or see, as in a looking-glass,
Her pigmy, dimpled person pass,
Nought great therein but eyes and hair."

Those who had known Miss Belle Osbourne in Paris in the winter sang her praises, and so overcame the scruples of the others who complained of the restraint the coming guests would inflict on them, and all prepared to do their best to make Chevillon's a fitting place for the Californians.

Returning to Gretz, Louis Stevenson was told he was to take the end of the table near the new arrivals, and guide and keep the conversation in his vicinity in correct channels; so he, for once not in search of adventures, walked in upon a trio who for the rest of his life were to be his fellow-voyagers. Louis filled the place of host judiciously. The other men were well satisfied. He devoted himself to the mother, and never threatened to enter the lists against them for the favour of the taking daughter of sweet seventeen. At first they thought Louis was amiably attaching himself to Mrs. Osbourne to give them fuller opportunity to devote themselves to "Belle," and were astonished to find his attentions to Mrs. Osbourne

were not disinterested. Louis never seems to have hesitated in his allegiance. From the evening he was elected to the host's chair, and told to talk circumspectly to the new-comers, he found Mrs. Osbourne suited him. Although he revelled in a tussle of arguments which whetted his appetite for battle, he also enjoyed having a sovereign sway, and an undisputed uncontradicted flow to his conversation, when he had a good listener. Mrs. Osbourne smoked with a soothing relish, looking out of her inscrutable eyes straight before her, sphinx-like in her immovableness, but hearkening all the while, and occasionally showing a flash of teeth in such a rapid smile that some one said it was like sheet lightning. It was, as Oliver Wendell Holmes says, no case of copper against copper, "but alien bloods develop strange currents when they flow close to each other." Those who remember these days at Gretz have recollections of aquatic parties, half the day spent in bathing dresses on the river's edge, or boating on the Luon. Then there were fits of industry after spells of waterside loitering, and the artists tramped off to their *motifs*. Mrs. Osbourne

named one *motif* in true and terse but unpoetical American language, "The pinchbug *motif*," for it was close to an anthill. Louis acted as porter to her belongings, undeterred by the ominous title suggestive of midges or gadflies. A white umbrella, a stool, an easel, and a *pochard* box was the artist's kit. Louis bore Mrs. Osbourne's, and some seeing the diminutive pictures of him by Walter Crane in the frontispiece of *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*, urging sly Modestine up the slope, past our Lady of the Snows, till, silhouetted against the sunset, he is preparing to disappear over the brow of the hill, say it reminded them of him at these times. He never looked his height (five feet ten inches) owing to his stoop, or rather the forward bend of his head; and when walking alongside any one he had a habit of going a step or two ahead and looking back at his companion, which lessened his appearance of height. As beast of burden for the artist's kit, which was mostly strapped on his back, he started forth jauntily, with Mrs. Osbourne a few steps in the rear, his hands keeping pace with his tongue, his shoulders, which also gesticulated, loaded and

heightened with his load. The others watched the couple, laughing at their oppositeness in manner and appearance,—Mrs. Osbourne, very short, with her skirts neatly lifted, picking her way steadily, but having to hurry at times to keep up with her long and lean cavalier, who, flourishing his eloquent hands, strode along at a rapid rate.

Robert Louis Stevenson had a toe-and-heel preciseness in his walk, which suggested the guinea fowl's undulating progress as he glided along. Going and coming to Mrs. Osbourne's sketching ground Louis led the way, talking as volubly when returning as when he had started out in the freshness of the morning. After the *Inland Voyage* they did not, as of yore at Chevillon's, sit and amuse themselves solely by talk after the day was done. They clubbed together, and invested in a piano, and danced and sang. There were contests and prizes for all manner of things besides the prize for drawing, which had been fought for at Barbizon. Mrs. Osbourne's recitation, in a consistently dead-level voice, of "George Washington and the Pear Tree," won honours for the most monotonous

story. They kept a vocabulary, written in charcoal on the white walls, of words which were strange to some in their polyglot assemblage, many being from across the Atlantic. "Murka" headed the list.

For a couple of years, spring and autumn, from 1876 to 1878, much the same company met at Gretz. The last season there was disunion amongst them, silence and glum looks in the salon instead of jest and badinage. Meals were taken at different times, and the good old comradeship disappeared. Louis, who had still his boyish love of marshalling puppets on the stage, whether they were paper or flesh and blood ones, tried to drill his artist friends into the places the comedy or drama of their life demanded. There was a talk of a duel, and Louis was eager to have it orthodoxly staged. Miss Osbourne's eyes had led to this romantic climax. Louis was to second one swain. He called a meeting of the community to arrange correctly for every detail. One who had a drolly humorous way of looking on the most serious side of everything, proposed firstly that the mutual piano, which they

had subscribed for in piping times of peace, should be sold to a rival inn, and pistols and a pick be bought with the proceeds, to enable them (as they were all out of funds) to fight the duel, and then to bury the one who fell, "far in the forest shade." This plan evoked laughter, at which the earnest Louis was sorely annoyed. He hated ridicule when he was engaged on any "make-believe," and the chance of a real live duel, about a lady fair too, was not likely to come in his way again in this unromantic century. The would-be duellists' weapons were not forthcoming. One pistol, rusty and incompetent, existed. There was no money to buy more; but the piano was not sold, and the duelling fever died out.

Meanwhile the century was growing beyond its seventies, and before it reached its eighth decade Louis Stevenson's road had diverged widely from the path of those who knew him in his Edinburgh days. He went off *Across the Plains* to the magnet which drew him to a far country. The barriers to his marriage with Mrs. Osbourne were removed by a divorce, and

he married her in San Francisco, and became for a space a "Silverado Squatter." He only returned on brief visits to Edinburgh. He tried a summer or two in Scotland, one up in the clear northland air at Braemar, where, to amuse Sam Osbourne, he began *Treasure Island.*

In 1881 he became a candidate for the Chair of Constitutional Law and History in Edinburgh University, for it was the one post in his *Alma Mater* for which he felt himself fitted. His parents were anxious to have him near them, and the earnings by his pen were very small, not enough to support his delicate self and his wife and son. He could again truly say, "It was a comfortable thought to me that I had a father." His chance of success was small, although the retiring Professor, Sheriff Æneas Mackay, urged him to stand. His fame was only dawning then. His father's luncheon Bibles and his popular *Jekyl and Hyde* were about his only published volumes. To Law he had paid no court. He had shown to the public no interest in history, he had not then even written a footnote. May be, as he was one of the weak

ones the vicious climate had not killed in infancy, he might have lived the longer in his weather-beaten but healthful City of the Winds, if he had been appointed. There is an amusing sketch by his step-daughter, Belle (then Mrs. Strong), of Louis teaching history to her small son, Austin. Mrs. Stevenson, senior, when in Samoa, took the boy's education into her hands, and told him to remember not many were schooled by so antique a relative as their great-grandmother. Louis gave him history lectures. Mrs. Strong has portrayed Austin, his hair on end, his hands clutching his knees for support, and leaning as far back as the wall allows, while his historian's back is only seen, his arms uplifted, his thin fingers stretched out. One can somehow see by the reflection of his tale on Austin's face that it is a gruesome and a bloody story, such as Scotch history supplies freely. Though R. L. S. became only a history lecturer to his household, he evidently was a fearsomely eloquent one.

Louis tried to find health at Davos and Hyères, but finally built a house at Bournemouth, with the name of a strong tower on its lintel, Skerry-

vore. Then the gipsy glamour came over him once more, and he roved further afield. In 1887 he tried Saranac, and later began his Pacific voyaging, which ended in his settling among the engaging barbarism of Samoa. In 1881, when he was at Pitlochrie, he wrote to me, apologising for not doing so sooner, "for I have been steadily travelling, and that tires me shockingly now-a-days." I was on the eve of an Antipodean trip, and in a postscript he says, "It seems a long way to go. *Remember me to New Zealand* when you see it." This little jest at the end was like him, a flicker of nonsense; for he little thought then that Brighter Britain and he were to be neighbours. His health for a while seemed restored in the far-off South, but he overwrought at his mastered vocation. "On one of the hottest days I have ever known in Samoa," said Mr. Bazett Haggard, who had been at Vailima on the 3rd December, 1894, "Stevenson was continuously at work." This strenuous energy in one highly strung and never robust had the fatal termination which was inevitable. Louis had hoped and prayed his end, when it came, would be mercifully swift. Even

his desire to die in his boots was granted to him. With no great shadow to darken his path he had, as he said of his father, "a happy life; nor was he less fortunate in his death, which, at the last, came to him unaware." His right hand, we know by the strength with which he drew *Weir of Hermiston*, never lost its cunning, nor ever did he forget thee, Auld Reekie!

When the voice of love fell, toneless, on his closing ears, perchance it was granted him to hear once more

> "The old cry of the wind
> In our inclement city?"

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